THE SECRET STAIR

PEMBERTON GINTHER

THE
SECRET
STAIR
—
GINTHER

Peggy Ann
Christmas 1944

Mother and Daddy

"WE THREE ARE THE ONLY LIVING BEINGS WHO HAVE SEEN IT."
"The Secret Stair."

(See page 75)

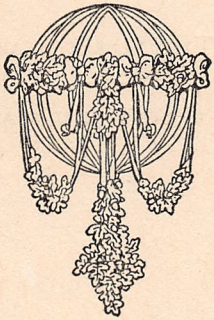
THE SECRET STAIR

A MYSTERY STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

PEMBERTON GINTHER

ILLUSTRATED



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MYSTERY STORIES
FOR GIRLS

By PEMBERTON GINTHER

Large 12 mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE SECRET STAIR
THE JADE NECKLACE
THE THIRTEENTH SPOON

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THE SECRET STAIR

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To *Alice* who can write of this country of Olympus so much better than I

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THE SECRET STAIR

Chapter I

THE NIGHT LETTER

IT was very hot. After the chilly rain of yesterday the sun burned like fire. Sally halted at the edge of the truck-patch and surveyed the green rows of vegetables in the moist, brown, steaming earth. The lettuce and onion-bed both needed attention.

She hated to weed onions, so she went straight to the long rows of up-thrusting pale green lances, and squatted down, frowning. Her slim brown fingers worked quickly, deftly weeding out the tiny impudent intruders. She hardly glanced at the stolid, respectable onions. She wore an old red gingham that had burst at the elbows and so reduced itself from the rank of school-dress to work-frock. She could feel it giving way at the shoulders now, but she did not care. She kept on nipping out the weeds and frowning. Life was so full of difficult things.

Onions and beans and lettuce had to have a lot done for them, but it paid. They gave back so

much. Like some people. People who could give the world a lot ought to have their chance,—like these dratted onions. She sighed and pushed back a strand of pale gold hair that had fallen on her cheek and glanced absently down at the lop-sided old stone house, where Mrs. Shaw was having one of her sick-headaches and where Aimee would be paring the potatoes and looking for her to come down to start supper before Andy came in from the Works.

"Those Agricultural Works," she muttered. The thought of their dull brick walls and black refuse-heaps was vinegar to her sore mind. There, within those dingy walls, Andy was prisoned beyond hope. "Why did I ever promise him?" she said, half aloud. "Idiot,—when I knew there wasn't a ghost of a chance."

She dashed a handful of tiny rag-weed on the pile beside her and ruthlessly tucked away the two little curls on either side of her face. She poked them up into the loose waves of hair behind her ears. What right had she to bedizen herself with curls when she was about to play false to her word? She ought to pour ashes on her head. . . .

She had handed him the letter that morning before the others were down. How his face had blazed as he read it, first to himself and then aloud, in short jerky pauses. Lane and Company had offered to take him into their drafting department if he could arrange to come at once. For one blissful unthinking moment they had both been

raised to glory, and "You've got to go!" she had cried out. In the next breath, they had dropped into the black pit of despair, for they knew what the great firm of architects did not,—that Andy's salary at the Works barely kept the family on its feet; for there were five of them in the old stone house and only the pension to manage on.

His white face had frightened her and she had caught at his sleeve saying vehemently, "It's your chance at last, Andy. You've got to go. You shall go."

He had hushed her and made her swear not to breathe a word to anyone, but she recalled how he had looked at her. Her vehemence had got under the hard shell of his commonsense, and he had gone away,—she knew it,—with the unborn hope stirring within him. Andy, at twenty-two bound to the wheel of things, saw the shadow of his dreams in those fruitless words of hers. All in vain, though, for his dreams and his struggles after those dreams must be packed away between the leaves of the big ledgers at the Works. In vain the hours spent over the plans and drawings left by their father; vain the sketches made in the short noon-hour; vain the nights of study; he must grind out a livelihood. At twenty-two his future was settled.

A flare of anger burned beneath the freckles on her thin cheeks and her eyes grew almost black,—the beautiful hazel eyes that were gold or gray at times and were the best feature of her plain

face. She dashed her fists into the warm brown earth in a futile burst of revolt. She wanted so terribly to help Andy to happiness.

"Money," she muttered with biting scorn. "I hate the very name of it. Everybody is crazy over it. Talk about the Golden Calf—"

Over on the next hill-top, across undulating waves of woodland and farm land, the low afternoon sun caught out the steeple of a church and a glitter of scattered white specks among its greenery. Over there among the tombstones was a grave where the birds sang merrily; over here in the bustle of life was work, strain, disappointment, and hard things to be faced.

She sat back on her heels. The soft curves of her kindly lips turned to grimness. "You must give up the scholarship," she said aloud, harshly, as to some grudging enemy. "Antoinette Dripps shall have it."

Antoinette Dripps, who was rich! She felt as if death were in her heart but she did not falter. Bus-fare, new clothes, new books stood like giants in the way. She weeded blindly, in panic, tearing out weed after weed—and a few young onions as well—saying over and over, "Andy's done more. He had to go to work when he was sixteen. He's done more. . . ."

The gnarled apple-trees flung a drift of fading blossoms into the lap of the soft south wind and a robin on the broken pickets of the boundary fence sang joyously. The tall forest-trees beyond

the next field were clothed in young leaves and a white foam of dog-wood surged at every woodland border. Life was pushing up, over-flowing in beauty; it was only human beings who had to toil and sweat—

"Sally! Oh, Sally!"

She squatted among the onions and went on weeding furiously. Even her love for the little girls was dimmed for the moment. "She's found a new specimen that she wants me to classify," she thought. "It will keep."

Janet was not to be bluffed. The glint of her faded lilac frock among the apple-trees showed she was mounting rapidly, and when she came to the open space below the truck-patch she began to run. A flash of blue lower down made Sally jump to her feet. If Aimee were in it, there must be something. Was mother's headache worse?

Janet began to shout, panting, and her thin treble drowned the robin's song. "A telegram. A night letter. From Mrs. Van Dirk. Oh, Sally, you're to go at once!"

Sally's anxiety found vent in unusual irritation. "Don't fib. I don't know any Mrs. Van Dirk," she began, but Janet's quick patter of words, like an April shower, put out her flame.

"It's someone called Cousin Ellen," she rushed out the news to forestall Aimee who was also shouting as she ran up the slope. "You're to go to see her. She said she's sent money,—how do you telegraph money?"

Aimee, her sandy hair about her eyes, broke in on the youngest sister. "A night letter, Sally," she cried in her huskiest, Scotchiest voice. "Fifty words. Varry important."

Sally faced around to meet Aimee, and it was as though the sultry air about her lightened and cleared, so that she breathed more easily. "What is it, Aimee?" she asked in her alert, elder-sister voice. "Tell me."

"She's sent twenty-five dollars for you to travel on," Aimee went to the core. "And she says 'Will arrange recompense later.' She must be varry rich, Sally—"

"She asked if you were healthy," giggled Janet, shaking back her dark locks. "What a funny thing to ask."

Aimee cut her short. "She wouldn't want a girl with an everlasting cold in her head, like Cora Linton, would she? Shall you go, do you think, Sally?"

"I certainly shall," said Sally, feeling her salvation near. Her promise to Andy might yet be redeemed. "Tell me every word, Aimee."

They went down through the old orchard, with Janet picking her way after them on her delicate legs and Aimee eloquent after her fashion when roused. "This Mrs. Van Dirk was married to Cousin Jeremy Norton, Mother says. She saw her at his funeral years and years ago. She must be married again, though she was varry old to wed, I think. But she has moved away up on the

Hudson River, and she wants you to come visit her, though she's not laid eyes on you, Mother says, since you were five and extra small for your age."

"Why does she want me?" wondered Sally, with more and more excitement.

"Goodness knows," returned Aimee, shaking her head. "Maybe she's about to die and wants young company to cheer her up at the last."

"Mercy, what an idea!" cried Sally, with an infectious little laugh, so that Janet hopped closer to catch the joke.

"Why not?" Aimee was undaunted. "People have to die, and she never asked when she was younger. You'd best make your will, Sally, for you may be her heiress and if anything happened to the train on your way home, your mind would be at rest."

"Stuff!" cried Sally energetically, pushing aside the hint of romance in the picture. "Come on, I'll race you down."

The three were as unlike as possible. Sally, like Andrew, was all Shaw,—keen, alert, curious about the mysteries of the earth on which men walked. The Shaws had all been born with the wooden spoon of necessity in their smiling mouths, from the colonial Shaw who had built his own useless air-ship to the salesman Shaw who had sold Chicago agateware in some lost corner of Africa only to get in return a fatal jungle fever. The two younger girls were Nortons,—the last mem-

bers of a family of the golden spoon type,—their mother's family. The Nortons' fortunes had vanished with them not because they were riotous livers but perhaps because a golden spoon is not so good as a wooden one to cut wisdom teeth on.

In these two girls, fortune had played the vanishing Nortons a trick. Aimee, named for the grandmother Cleo who had never lost her nostalgia for her native Paris, had proved a copy of the Highland dame who had wed Grandfather John Norton. Janet, whose name forestalled another Scotch lassie,—for you never can tell how babies will turn out,—had grown into the likeness of Madame Cleo, with all her tricks of speech and manner. Mrs. Shaw had vowed if there were any more babies, she would wait till they could name themselves.

Sally reached the house before the others, for though she was a bit smaller than towering Aimee, she was fleet of foot. Mrs. Shaw was just coming out of the back-hall door with the telegram in her hand.

"Why, here you are," she said in some surprise. "I didn't know where the girls had vanished to. Do come in and hear this remarkable letter. Eli Rapp brought it just now."

She had the air of receiving Sally as if they were well-intentioned strangers. She waved her into the shabby sitting-room with a gesture of her beautiful hand—unimpaired by constant

housework,—and sank gracefully into a chair by the window. She was entirely different from any of her children, being one of the Norton beauties, with regular features, masses of bronze-gold hair and a charmingly modulated voice.

Sally plumped down into the corduroy arm-chair, well knowing that nothing would hurry Mrs. Shaw. She pressed her hands hard on the worn spots of the arms. "Well, Mother?" she breathed, and the little curls that had fallen down over her ears again shook with her effort to be patient.

"Where have you been to get so warm, my dear?" murmured Mrs. Shaw reproachfully, and she paused in the act of opening the telegram.

"Onion-patch. I'm not very hot," Sally's cheeks grew hotter. "Oh, *Mother!*"

Mrs. Shaw held out the flimsy paper. "Perhaps this speaks for itself better than I can interpret it," she said, gently. "I am leaving you entirely free to deal with it as you will, my child," and she sank back in her chair watching Sally as she devoured the message, which was addressed to Mrs. Andrew Shaw, Hill Road.

"It's for you,—Jan was fibbing after all," Sally muttered while her eyes devoured the first words but Mrs. Shaw paid no attention to the incoherent mumble. She was languorously intent on Sally's face, which was rosier than ever as she read:

"I am well but desire a young companion If Sarah is in good health, send her at once I am telegraphing

twenty five dollars for expenses Recompense arranged on arrival wire reply Take noon train from New York

Signed MRS. PHILIP VAN DIRK
Riverside House
Olympus, N. Y.''

''I shall go!'' cried Sally meeting her mother's eyes. ''I can come back if I don't suit, you know.''

Mrs. Shaw's lovely neck stiffened. ''If any of my children are to be criticised by an elderly person like Mrs. Van Dirk must be by this time, I shall put my foot down on the whole project. I believe I ought to go with you to see what she is like. Perhaps I might 'phone to her,—a voice is a great index to character.''

''It would cost a lot to 'phone up there,'' Sally interposed hastily. ''And voices don't tell much. Your lovely voice sounds small and thin over the 'phone, and an old lady's would be harder still. Here's Andy. You tell him, Mother.''

Andrew, a dark, tall, intellectual Shaw, came in with the suppressed hope of the morning still in his dark eyes, and Sally was ready to shout in triumph as she saw that hope glow into vigor as he listened. He cast a meaning look of inquiry at her but she shook her head. ''I didn't know about this,'' she said. ''It only came a little while ago. How do you get money that is telegraphed?''

They had to tell Mrs. Shaw about Lane and Company then, and when Aimee and Janet came in on them a few minutes later, they were all talking at once, very much excited and rather in-

coherent. Andy was the first to take thought.

"What is this Mrs. Van Dirk like, Mother? You say you've seen her."

"I can just remember her vaguely," Mrs. Shaw answered slowly. "Rather grim, she seemed to me. But that may have been natural,—with her husband in the coffin there. I do recall clearly that she spoke, in the talk we had afterward about Cousin Jeremy, of having been called 'the beautiful Miss Browne, with an *e*,'—though she was far from being attractive,—from the standpoint of classic beauty, I mean," she added hastily. "Her character was no doubt perfect, since she married the saintly man. I was perhaps too thoughtless to do her justice."

So, having completely confused herself and her hearers, she smiled charmingly on Sally and drew Aimee down on the arm of her chair to smooth the tumbled sandy locks. Life had always great zest for her and privations, pain and trouble had no power over her nor her easy-going outlook on people and events.

Sally and Andy looked at each other. "You can come back if she is too grim," Andy laughed, and her heart dropped a beat. She thought, "And keep you from going into Lane and Company? Never. Though she is a dragon with fire and claws." Aloud she said, "Let's get started. Aimee, you can get supper,—for practice,—while Mother writes out the telegram. Andy'll have time to take it and get the money."

"See here," said her brother. "What about this money? Is it a loan? We want to be clear about it. You mustn't feel under obligations, you know."

Mrs. Shaw looked uncomfortable. "I—I took it for granted she was sending it for the car-fare, just as we used to do at Elmwood. We used to send it to all our invited guests."

"She *said* 'for expenses.' People always pay car-fare," broke in Aimee. "Mrs. Jenks has to send it before the girls will come out from the employment-office—"

"Sally isn't a hired girl!" cried Janet hotly.

"I'll tell you what we can do," Andrew suggested, disregarding the younger fry. "We'll make up enough for Sally to pay her way if she needs to. I've got—"

"No, you shan't," Sally exploded. "You have to have that suit for the yearly dinner,—it'll be a disgrace if you don't."

He grinned at her. "If I am going to leave the Works—" he made a gesture and went on, "I have fifteen dollars. Aimee, better bring out that bank of yours. You are the only capitalist in the family, you know."

Aimee smothered a groan but went dutifully, while Janet began to rummage in her pockets, mumbling something about a nickel she had somewhere and Mrs. Shaw smiled ruefully. "I am always a little strapped at this time of the month," she said, as if confessing a bit of news. "The

pension doesn't come till next week. Otherwise . . ."

Sally spoke quickly to cover her emotions. "I've got seven dollars saved for—for things," she would not mention the scholarship, "and I have my two lawn dresses. Now, let's get the answer ready, Mother."

They were all tremendously animated by this break in their uneventful life, but not one of them —least of all Mrs. Shaw herself,—dreamed of hesitating to obey Sally's suggestions. This affair concerned her more closely than it did the others, and Mrs. Shaw had impressed it upon them that each one's character should be allowed to develop according to its natural bent. She had read many books on the subject of Child-Rearing while Andrew was in baby-clothes and had practiced her doctrines thoroughly. All that she said was, "*But* I must insist that if you find conditions trying, you must return at once. I will not have your bright nature stunted in an alien environment." That was the way she talked to them about their natures.

Sally laughed her gay laugh. "I guess my nature isn't easily suppressed," she said happily. "It's going to take a lot to discourage me. Do read us the telegram. I'm crazy to have it go."

Mrs. Shaw laid down her pen. "You know it is to be a night letter also so it can't start for hours," she replied and then she read what she

had written. Sally thought it too high-spirited but would not say so; Andy said nothing.

"Your letter received. Many thanks for your inquiries after us. I recall our last meeting and am glad to renew the agreeable bond, though ties of blood no longer bind us. Sally is perfectly healthy and will enjoy her visit with you. Kind regards to you, Cousin Ellen, from all."

"Just fifty words," she said with satisfaction. "I think it conveys all that is necessary."

As Andy went out Janet came in from an errand to the store for bread. "Miss Annie was in the store," she announced, "and she has a friend up in Olympus. She wants you to find out and write all about her, Sally. She—"

"Janet!" exclaimed Mrs. Shaw, wiping her pen with great care. "You ought not to have been gossipping already."

Janet rushed on, pattering out her words rapidly. "Her name is Minerva Paltz and she is housekeeper for someone. She wrote Miss Annie that her family had broken up, and she was with the young man now. Miss Annie don't remember the name of the family but they're rich people. And she wants to know who the young man is, and if it's respectable. And, oh, her friend says there are ghosts and things. I promised her you'd try to find out where Minerva Paltz lived and all about the ghosts. Isn't it lucky you're going right there!"

"Olympus may be a big place," Sally answered lightly. "You never can tell. We'll look it up after supper. Now, hop or Aimee will be after you."

Janet disappeared with a shrug and Sally dropped on her knees by her mother's chair. "Kiss me, Mummy," she said. "I feel as if we were going to have better times now. You'll write me all about Andy's going into Lane and Company, won't you? You write such fine letters."

Aimee thrust her sandy head in at the dining-room threshold. She bent forward to send her penetrating whisper across the space. "I just want to mention, Sally, that if you're going to make a will, Janet wants those blue beads of yours."

Mrs. Shaw shook her head. "Those girls!" she murmured. "What will they think of next? Ghosts and wills. I make it a rule not to interfere, as you know, but if I were you, I should leave Miss Annie's foolish friend to her folly, and not dabble in such obsolete matters as ghosts and such unscientific nonsense."

"Of course, I shan't be mixed up in it," Sally protested, with confidence. "But it will be rather fun to see a person who actually believes in that stuff. I must remember the name,—Minerva Paltz."

Chapter II

THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER

SALLY walked off the ferry-slip and looked about. There was no one to meet her. In the two days since the arrival of the letter, she had gone through all the stages of hope and doubt; she had prepared herself for varying shades of welcome from differing types of imagined people, but she was rather taken aback by the total lack of anyone interested in her arrival.

The two women who had got off the boat passed her without glancing at her. The June sunshine lay on the wide dusty space beyond the ferry-slip, on the empty street, the sleepy hotel and small shops on the slope and, beyond the smoky dark square of a small factory near the slip, was the broad hurrying river. The air had a tang of mountain sweetness, a hint of higher altitude that lay just back of the little town. She liked the place on first sight far better than the larger town across the river through which she had come from the train.

She went over to a man in a small wooden watch-box of a ticket-office. He was discussing the

brick industry with a truck-driver in clay-stained overalls. "Yes, sir, bricks is comin' in again," he delared. "This whole west shore's goin' to get right into the lime-light—what say?" He turned to Sally, as she repeated her question. "Mr. Philip Van Dirk? Yes, he lives here. Up that street yonder, beyond the factory. Just keep straight on till you come to the end. It's a white house with a couple or three big ash-trees in the yard," and he turned to the truck-driver again. "As I was sayin'—"

She felt very much of a stranger as she crossed the broad space to the quiet street that ran parallel to the river. Perhaps Aimee was right and she was to be no better than a servant here. She gripped her bag more tightly and walked with a quicker step. If it were going to be that bad, she meant to face it as soon as possible.

She passed the square, gloomy factory and found herself in a pleasant, drowsing, forgotten corner, with the green slope of the shelving river-bank on one side and on the other a few serene old houses, vine-covered and shaded by ancient trees,—the whole steeped in sunshine and contentment. The road ended abruptly beyond the last house in a thick wall of evergreens.

The white-painted house was smaller than she had expected, though her ideas of her mission were rapidly shrinking. It stood close to the street, with only a narrow strip of grass and flower-bed to separate it from the uneven brick sidewalk. Its

front blinds were drawn to a uniform line and there was an air of almost parsimonious neatness about it. Not at all a house where a young companion would be surrounded with the luxury that Janet joyfully had visioned. She began to understand why health had been insisted on,—it took a lot of scrubbing to produce that effect in a house.

She went up the two low wooden steps and paused with her hand raised to the bell-pull. A shrill voice chanting some doggerel rhyme had stabbed the serenity of the place. From behind one of the great twin ash-trees a few yards beyond the house, just where the road took its abrupt turn along the wall of tall evergreens, a small head was stuck out, peering in the opposite direction up the unseen road. It was an impish head, with pale face and thin wisps of tow-colored hair. Its owner sent his challenge as clear as a crowning bantam-cock.

"Philip Dukes
Afraid o' spooks!"

It was not much of a tune, yet it stuck in the mind. He sang it over and over with great rapidity and clearness.

"Spooks," she thought with a little start. It recalled Miss Annie's friend, Minerva Paltz. It was strange that should be the first word to meet her. She rang the bell hard and waited. The urchin's chant went on. Suddenly it ended in a squeal and she caught a glimpse of a wizened little body fleeing like a swift shadow up the road by the

evergreen-wall. He had evidently been taken by surprise from the rear.

The young man who came up the river-slope at a leisurely pace was laughing. He was plainly the target of the chant. He was rather tall, very slender but with a suggestion of strength in his wide shoulders and stubborn neck. His tumbled black hair accented his very odd light eyes, and his straight black brows came together over a well-shaped nose. He had a look of arrogance that was not softened by his amusement at the urchin nor by his careless dress,—worn trousers, old tennis-shoes and a soiled white sweater humped up about the shoulders.

"Are you looking for Minerva Paltz?" he asked with a ceremonious little bow. "She is out marketing. She will be back very shortly."

Minerva Paltz again! "No," she told him baldly. "I came to see Mrs. Philip Van Dirk. Doesn't she live here?"

"Mrs. Van Dirk lives over there," he waved his hand negligently to the south. "Beyond that screen of shrubberies. Riverside House, or the Van Dirk place, as it is called."

She felt herself dismissed by his grand manner, —which reminded her of the Norton traditions, —but she was now too near her goal to feel any rebuff in it. His brusqueness was rather in keeping with his appearance. "Thank you, Mr. Dukes," she said as she came down off the steps. "I'm sorry to have bothered you."

He looked at her closely as he stood aside to let her pass. "Pray remember me to Mrs. Van Dirk." His voice was mocking. "I shall hope to give myself the pleasure of—being asked in there one of these days."

There was something so insolent in the words, emphasized by the little pause, that her first liking for him died, and she answered stiffly, "I shall give your message to both Mr. and Mrs. Van Dirk, Mr. Dukes."

He started slightly, laughed a low joyous laugh and bowed with a grand sweep of the hand. "Pray do," he cried in delight. "Particularly to Mr. Van Dirk. It will enlighten and divert the Ethiopian nation to witness that event. Please deliver it in person. I rely on you."

Her face flushed and she did not answer. She went towards the wall of tall arbor-vitæ and yew.

"He's crazy," she told herself. "With his Ethiopian nation and his messages. No wonder the house looks like a prison. He's probably escaped while his keeper is out. If he's the young man she keeps house for, it's no wonder she doesn't want to write about him. Oh, what a lovely old house!"

The Van Dirk house stood in a wide area of trees and river-bank, all green and gay and sunny, a mansion of old-time dignity with tall chimneys, great multi-paned windows, and a tall-columned portico with generous steps and a gable that joined the roof-cornices against the blue June sky.

Its velvet patch of lawn sloped to the river-edge, where beside a flight of stone steps was a tiny landing. Old Joris Van Dierck had built the house in 1790 around the low stone home of Dutch colonial days, and his son Philip, named after the French émigré Philippe de Severne, had added the great portico after his return from Egypt where he had seen service under Mahomet Ali and where he had got his mania for digging into the secrets of the past. Shut away from the sights and sounds of the village by its green wall on the north, and on the west, by its stables and outbuildings to the south and by the river at its front, it lay like some enchanted demesne, sufficient to itself.

She went forward, as into some happy dream; it was so much better than she had dared to picture even at the first wild moments of Aimee's prophecy. Up the steps of the portico she went, with a fleeting impression of something unusual in the ornament and shape of the columns, and crossed to the rug towards the open door, with its fan-light and side-lights of real old Dutch amplitude. A middle-aged, angular negress with eyes like a homeless dog's and with the ceremonious manners of an old-time house-servant was there before she reached the threshold.

"Yassum," she said in answer to Sally's question. "And she's expectin' you in de little settin' room. Step right in, please. I done knowed it wuz you, Miss Shaw, ma'am, when I seen you shas-

seyin' up de path. Dem Warfare ladies what's collectin' dis week hain't got yere yit but I knowed you wuzn't one ob dem,'' and she took Sally's bag with a broad ingratiating smile that showed the loss of a front tooth. ''Mis' Van Dirk's in de little settin' room, ef you'll please to step up. Mah name's Maria.''

There was no lack of welcome here. Sally felt slightly embarrassed by the exuberance of her reception. Yet it was not unpleasant to be given such deference. She followed the immaculate white cap across the broad hall to one of the two flights of stairs that circled to join in a large square open hall above, that had a number of doors ranged on either side and a big ornamental window at its front. Everything was on a lavish scale,—velvet carpets with dim Victorian roses, carved settles and pictures in fretted gold frames in the Italian style. The half-open door of a room to the left showed blue brocade furnishings, filmy lace curtains,—the chamber of a lady of the old days, with the fragrance of leisurely life like the odor of dried rose-leaves.

Maria stopped at the second door on the right. The first was a small unobtrusive panel in the wall, hardly more than a cupboard door, and—Sally noted mechanically—without a knob. The large handsomely furnished front room stood open and they passed through it to a small sitting-room or library, whose low bookcases lined the walls without a break, save for a curtained oblong where

the closed door was. A carved leather screen stood near the back window which was small and high and covered with beautiful iron scroll-work.

"Yere's Miss Shaw, Miss Nellie, ma'am," said Maria in a more subdued voice. "I brung her right up, lak you tole me to."

Sally saw the screen move. A figure rose from the desk by the window and come forward. A woman, plainly of birth and position, white-haired and vigorous with a sort of feline energy, whose slightly protruding brown eyes were alight with interest and curiosity, though she spoke at first in formal phrases.

"It is so nice of you to be so prompt," she said as she took Sally's hand in a firm, bony clasp. "I haven't seen you since you were a wee tot but I should recognize you at once. It is quite like renewing a friendship, instead of making one."

Under her light manner Sally felt a sincerity of welcome, as real as that of the maid though less openly shown. She sent Maria away with the bag and made Sally sit down on a small sofa beside her while she questioned her about the family, and herself, her tastes, her pastimes. She appeared pleased with what she found, and grew friendly and gay to a surprising degree.

"We shall be great chums, pals they call it, don't they? Yes, that is the word. I am glad you are not sickly. Not nervous. A nervous girl is so hard to live with,—always imagining things, you know. And I do want you to be happy. You're not

to run away and leave us," she ended archly.

"I surely don't want to do that," Sally answered and she laughed, thinking of the 'dragon with fire and claws.' "I hope to stay. What am I to do, though? Perhaps—"

"Ah, yes, that reminds me," cried Mrs. Van Dirk with a girlish clap of her hands. "Did you have enough for the journey? I should have sent more. Quite enough, you say? No, you must not give me back a cent. I meant you to have it all. And while we are breaking the ice, let's get rid of all the horrid practical part. Your duties will be to read to me and to dust the finer ornaments and things, and—and—I can't think of anything just now, but no real work. Will three dollars a week be too little?"

"Three dollars," exclaimed Sally and was about to add, "to do nothing?"

"Perhaps five would be better," Mrs. Van Dirk interposed hastily. "Yes, we will say five. It's worth it to me," and then she caught herself up, adding, "I do love young companionship. We will be real pals. Remember that. I used to be young myself. 'The beautiful Miss Browne' they used to call me. Can you imagine it?"

Sally, halting between perfidy and offence, was saved by the telephone-bell and the opportune appearance of Maria with some mail. Mrs. Van Dirk released Sally's hand which she had taken, and sprang up lightly. "Show Miss Sally her room, Maria. I am going to call you Sally like

your own people do," she said gaily. "Now go along, Maria, and don't chatter. Remember." Her tone had an edge which she softened, "Imagination. That's Maria's curse. If she had less imagination, she'd be all I could wish for."

Maria stood silent, rolling her eyes and thrusting the tip of her tongue through the space where the tooth was lost. When her mistress turned to the 'phone, she stalked out of the room. Sally had to hurry to keep up with her.

The room was in the oldest portion of the house, the first one beyond the large front hall-room, a pleasant, informal, cozy place with windows overlooking the river and as many of the village-roofs as could be see over the tops of the shrubbery-wall. It was furnished in brown, with yellow linings to the curtains and yellow linens on bed and dressers and a soft worn yellow rug on the floor. The few pictures were photographs in brown frames. The most delightful part about it to Sally was the bath-room all for herself. After sharing one old-fashioned bath with four others, she felt as luxurious as a Roman emperor.

Maria, still very silent, was opening her bag and taking out the clothes. Sally had never had this done for her, but she had read magazines and knew how to behave. She stood at the window while Maria brought out the scant array of clothes,—contributions from the Sunday best of the entire family; even Andy had contributed a scented glove-case presented him by an admirer

in the Works. As Maria hung the garments in the closet, she began to talk again.

"Law, Miss Sally," she said with the innate courtesy of her race. "I reckon you look mighty purty in dis yere green frock." It was Mrs. Shaw's white lace dyed with Daylight Dye. "Nice lady-some close you got, too. Not so decolly-tay about de knees, neither. Some of the young ladies do dress scan'lous. I reckon it's salubrious fer de health,—dem ventilagous close. Yessum, folks can't stand cumberin deyse'fs in de region ob de limbs now-a-days,—'cept de young gemman. De pants dey suppo't is sho' lavish at de shins."

Sally laughed and then, seeing the dark head of Mr. Dukes cross the sandy level beyond River-side lawn and disappear into the small boat-house there, she turned. "What's that they sing around here about spooks, Maria?" she asked. "I heard—"

Maria dropped the comb-and-brush set,—Aimee's birthday gift from her Sunday-school teacher—and turned a pale grey. " 'Tain't true!" she cried, catching at the bed-foot to steady her-self. " 'Tain't true, nohow." Then she recovered a bit. "Miss Nellie says you don't set no store on dem trashy tales. No siree! Dey ain't no spooks in dis yere day and ginerashum. Ef you hears 'em speechifyin' about ghost-es, you jest shet yore ears."

"It was only a little boy's nonsense, I know

that," returned Sally quickly. "Of course I don't believe in ghosts. I'm not so silly as to—"

"Sh-h-h," Maria edged close. "Jest you drap yore voice a mite, missy, when you speechifies about de ghost-es," she warned. "Mark me, I don' believe in no ghost-es nor no hants, no siree. But when I talks about dem, I whispers. It's de safes' way."

She took offence at Sally's involuntary ripple, and laid down the lid of the suitcase. "It's about time I wuz in de kitchen," she remarked with her former ceremonious manner. "Ef you'll ixcuse me, Miss Sally, ma'am, I'll be steppin'. I hopes you is settled comfortable, and ef you ain't, jest ax fer what you want."

Sally watched her stalk out of the room. "She's a funny old thing," she thought. "Terribly superstitious. It must be horrid to be afraid like that."

She broke off as the idea dawned on her. Minerva Paltz, with her young gentleman, Mr. Dukes, lived next door; the Van Dirks of Olympus, —Minerva's employers, had departed this life, leaving Riverside House to their far-away connection and his wife. This must be the haunted house.

"But who is Mr. Dukes? And why did he want to be asked in here?" she wondered, in a flutter.

There could be no answer to that until she applied to Mrs. Van Dirk who must know all. She would have to be careful, though. She recalled the

sharpness in "Miss Nellie's" tone when she had warned Maria against chattering too much. Plenty of time. She must see the house first.

She washed hastily and pulled on her blouse again, eager to be downstairs, to explore the rest of the stately rooms whose charm had captivated her hungry imagination. In the corridor she hesitated for a moment to assure herself that she was headed in the right direction. She need not have paused so long, however, for the large front hall-room was bright with sunshine, while the narrower hall beyond her door was darker.

It was not the fear of being lost that kept her from going on her way. It was the fascinating old hinges on a door in an angle of wall that jutted out into the corridor. They were large H hinges in wrought iron delicately shaped, such as Andy had loved to draw on his detail-plans. She went a few steps towards them and saw the length of the hallway which ended at a small, old-fashioned window covered by a dark green shade. She stood there, at the turn of the hall, hearing the outer sounds remotely, softened by distance, like ghosts of the summer day . . . bird songs, boats on the river, the horns of distant motor cars.

She liked the quiet old place with its low ceiling, its muted sounds and its simplicity of form. When she turned to go to the front stairs, she glanced back. A slim masculine figure passed at the far end from one room to the opposite one, closing the door noiselessly after him. Mr. Van

Dirk, without a doubt. She wished she had seen his face. She would meet him at dinner, however, and would deliver the message which she had forgotten until now.

The drawing-room was an enormous apartment with a huge carved fire-place, elaborate rose-colored satin furniture in the style of the last, unlucky Louis of France, vases of Sèvres porcelain on the mantel-shelf and cabinets of teak-wood, and painted screens. Two people were sitting there; Mrs. Van Dirk, or as she was already called in the village Mrs. Ellen, and another, a small lady in black, reading by the side window.

Mrs. Ellen presented Sally to the stranger as if Sally were a trophy of her own prowess. "Cynthia, this is my young Sally, whom I have just got for company. Sally, this is Miss Cynthia Dean, your sainted second-cousin Jeremy's third cousin on his mother's side."

It sounded like Lewis Carroll's "I thought it was a buffalo," but Sally had no inclination to amusement. The small lady in black rose, laid down her magazine and came forward. She wore a skirt that hid her narrow feet and her pale hair was in a tight knot, but she had a warm hand-clasp, a sweet, fluttering voice and a pair of bright eyes that reminded Sally of the wren in the arbor at home.

"I am very glad to meet you," she said with the nicest smile. "It's very pleasant to have young people in the house,—particularly girls.

Though I suppose you are just about grown-up, according to the modern code."

Before Sally could answer, Maria appeared at the back door of the drawing-room. "Yore dinnah am served, Miss Nellie, ma'am," she said very distinctly.

Mrs. Ellen ushered them into the dining-room at once. It was plain she was a martinet in the matter of punctuality. Sally's eyes took in the amazing length of the magnificent sideboard with its mirror reflecting the flower-decked table, the heavy carved chairs, the great inlaid *Kaas* or cupboard of old Joris' grandmother's time. The room was as imposing as a dining-room in a private house could be but it was not the room that occupied her attention. She was looking for Mr. Van Dirk.

Mrs. Ellen sat down at the head of the table. There were three places laid. Evidently the master of the house was not coming down. Ill, perhaps, or merely indisposed. Perhaps he did not like young company, as his wife called it. She waited till Mrs. Ellen had finishing ladling out a most excellent soup from a silver tureen that might have been designed by Benvenuto Cellini himself and then she spoke.

"I was to give you a message from a Mr. Dukes. He asked me to tell you and Mr. Van Dirk,—particularly Mr. Van Dirk,—that he hoped to be asked in very soon," she said, feeling all at once extremely foolish and officious.

She was startled by the effect of her words.

Miss Cynthia gave a gasp of dismay, Mrs. Ellen's face whitened and Maria disappeared into the pantry with a low howl. Mrs. Ellen's brown eyes shot icicles as she drew herself up. "My beloved husband has been in heaven these two years," she said harshly. "I know no Mr. Dukes."

"Oh, I am so sorry," murmured poor Sally in confusion. "I didn't know . . ."

"Nor I," Miss Cynthia put in, with warm sympathy. "Dear Cousin Ellen went through it alone. And he was such a wonderful man. At least, I've heard so. I was thinking of Cousin Jeremy . . ." and she, too, floundered. "Forgive me."

Mrs. Ellen's composure came back. She leaned forward to lay her knuckly hand on the other's soft, small fingers. "Dear Cynthia, there is nothing to forgive," she said warmly. "I was blessed with the companionship of two men, each remarkable in his own way and it would be base of me to give the precedence to either. Some women have only one image in their inner sanctuary," she sighed, "but I,—my Heavenly Father gave me a wider privilege,—I had room in my heart for two."

Sally ate the soup, for she was hungry, and she ate chicken and salad and dessert and listened to the talk of the two ladies about the late Philip and the departed Jeremy, and far down in the bottom of her consciousness the Shaw curiosity was sitting up and rubbing its eyes and muttering, "Then who was it in the back hall?"

She looked at Mrs. Ellen and realized that lady would not lend her ear to any questions about the inmates of her house. Miss Cynthia would be more apt to talk easily. She wished she might have her alone for an hour.

As if in answer to that wish, Mrs. Ellen smiled on her as she began to fold her napkin. "Miss Cynthia is going to show you the rest of the house. I think you will enjoy the museum. It is very old. Some of the Duc de Severne's treasures that he brought with him when he fled from the Revolution are there. Cynthia, you know the history. We went into that this afternoon when we made the inventory."

Miss Cynthia nodded and rose, as eager as a girl. She stooped to Mrs. Ellen's ear as she passed. "Shall I set the alarms?" she asked in a low tone. "You know we turned them off when the electricians were here this morning."

Mrs. Ellen shook her head. "I saw to it myself after they went," she said. "I put them on all the second-floor of the back building. Be sure to show Sally the de Severne jewel. A wonderful piece of work, my dear."

"I shall show her everything, but the ivories are really the most important," murmured Miss Cynthia. "I am glad you put on the alarms, Cousin Ellen. Such priceless things . . ."

As they went upstairs she added, "The late Colonel had the system put in, and young Mr. Philip helped him. It is the most perfect protec-

tion. No one can enter the house when it is on, without causing a terrible racket."

Sally tried to be diplomatic. "I suppose the servants have to be let in when they're out at night," she ventured. "Do all the family know how the alarm works?"

Miss Cynthia laughed a cheerful laugh. "There are only us three and Maria," she replied. "And Maria hasn't been out of the house since I came three days ago."

The Shaw imp sat up straighter. If there were no others in the family or in the house, who then was it who passed through the back hall at six o'clock this afternoon?

Miss Cynthia stooped, made a quick gesture, straightened and put the key in the lock. "I mustn't show even you where the switch is," she said, deprecatingly. "Only Cousin Ellen and her lawyer and, now, myself know how to shut off this alarm." She put her hand on the knob and turned. "And, of course, young Philip Van Dirk who devised it."

"Young Philip—?" Sally began.

Miss Cynthia did not hear her. She swung the door open. "Isn't it a nice old room?" she said. "Seems to me, the old builders knew how to make you love a place."

Chapter III

SHADOWS IN THE HALL

SALLY gasped at the rich sparkle of color that the setting sun caught out of cabinets and show-cases. The warm light, flooding through two windows with the same intricate iron grille as in the small sitting-room, burned on carved Venetian glass goblets, on old silver standing-cups, on an embroidered chasuble and three tattered silk banners that hung beside an unfaded Gobelin tapestry of The Adoration of the Magi, and focussed on a small glass case in the center of the octagonal room.

"A copy of the crown of Queen Clodra of the Merovingian line," Miss Cynthia read the label on a roughly wrought gold band inset with large colored stones. "The Merovingians were French of course. I forget when she lived but it was long, long ago. Charlemagne or somebody . . ." she murmured hastily.

Sally was intent on the open satin box in the center of the case where a great red jewel lay in the ray of sunlight, and Miss Cynthia, quick to note what interested others, explained that it was

a copy of the famous ruby dragon of the Louvre, the *Côte de Bretagne*. "Only this is a garnet, and not as valuable as it is curious," she said. "But I love the ivories, over in this other case. These Chinese pieces are exquisite, aren't they?"

Sally bent over the case. The ivories did not attract her as much as the enamels and jewels. The glowing colors drew and warmed her, released a spring of happiness. She glanced past the ivory chessmen and gods. "Those things over there remind one of the Arabian Nights," she said, indicating a few buckles in hammered gold with details in repoussé filled in with amber.

"That," said Miss Cynthia, "is ancient Celtic, —and that brooch with the great turquoises is Anglo-Saxon . . . early English, you know . . . Chaucer or King Arthur . . . or maybe not. But early English for sure. But do look at the ivories, for they had a lot to do with the Van Dirk family. Strange how a piece of elephant tusk can have such fascination for sturdy old Dutchmen like they were. Perhaps it was because they were so valuable,—the ivories, I mean. But, anyway, they've always had a passion for ivory, ever since old Joris built this museum and started the collection. He had a friend, the Duc de Severne who had to run away from that dreadful French Revolution, who came to live here,—in the old house, —with the young wife he married on the ship, and they say it was this Frenchman who gave or left some of these things because Joris had given

money to the other emigrants as well as having this Duke and his wife live here with him."

The word "Duke" flitted through Sally's mind and left no impression at the time. She was listening intently, for it might be that a family ghost would pop out its grizzly head.

"They were all crazy over ivory,—the men of the family, I mean," Cynthia went on, her hand resting on the back of a Louis Fifteenth chair. "The tablet there came from Egypt. Philip, the son of Joris,—the one who put on the portico with that queer medallion and heathenish columns,—got it from a friend of his . . . something to do with funerals, I think it is. Even that cousin of the late Colonel's, John Van Dirk, who expected the property to come to him, couldn't get away from the ivory idea and when he lost the inheritance,—Cousin Ellen didn't tell me clearly just how or why,—he set up that horrid factory over there. You saw it, didn't you?"

Sally nodded. "A smelly sort of factory."

"Bone buttons," Miss Cynthia was earnest. "The poor relation of ivory, Cousin Ellen calls them. One and all, they have it. . . ."

There was a sound of a foot-step, light yet firm, and Mrs. Ellen came into the room with a quick, mechanical glide, like an automaton just wound up. "Cynthia, I have a note from Mr. Jackson, my lawyer, and he says possibly he may get down tomorrow some time. So our little excursion to Albany is put off. Have you seen the treasures?"

she asked Sally. "Quite a collection for a private house, is it not? I want to sell it but I am afraid Mr. Jackson will not consent. He seems to have extraordinary powers for an executor. But we won't talk business, it's such a dull subject! Let's go down to the portico and enjoy the view. The moon is rising and it is lovely out-of-doors now. You can see the rest of the house tomorrow."

The way she said "lovely" won Sally's heart; there was such a warmth of feeling, so much emotion in it. She was glad to feel Mrs. Ellen's hand on her arm and she fell into step with her as they went along the corridor, while Miss Cynthia closed and locked the door. "Dear Cynthia is such a comfort," Mrs. Ellen's low tone was confidential. "She is the most absolutely truthful, unselfish person in the world. I don't say she is blessed with a penetrating intellect but she is trustworthy to the last degree. A lovely character."

They sat for an hour or two in the wicker lounging chairs on the portico, while the moon came up over the roofs and steeples of the town across the river and cast dark shadows among the hills. The silver glitter of the river had a path of light thrown across it, straight to the little landing. It was lovely, as Mrs. Ellen had said, though she was the first to go indoors and seemed somewhat relieved when Sally and Miss Cynthia rose to follow her. Ten o'clock was striking when Sally went up past the tall inlaid clock on the first landing. She was sleepy and happy, oh, far happier than

she could have dreamed two days ago up there in the onion-patch.

As she turned to the back corridor, she noticed that the wall-light at the side flickered strangely, throwing her distorted shadow along the floor and walls of the narrow hallway. The current went off for a second and then came on full-force . . . some trouble at the power-house, no doubt. Just at that second a small screech-owl in the big tree beyond the back window shrilled plaintively.

Sally was at her own door when she felt herself caught about the knees in a convulsive grasp. It was Maria, who had flung herself out of the dimness of the floor at Sally's feet.

"Oh, Miss Sally, ma'am," she gasped. "Lemme see de light. Hol' out yore hand, O Lawd, and save me!"

Sally unclasped her clutching fingers. Her first thought was that Maria was in a fit. She pulled her into her room and shut the door, snapped on the light and looked at her. She did not know what to do with persons in fits; though she vaguely recalled cold water, or was it hot? as a remedy. Maria sat huddled with her arms over her face, shivering and muttering, "Git off'n me, ole debbil. Step ahint me, Satan. I ain't no back-slider. Ise a Christian Baptist. Ise a Baptist Christian . . ."

Sally shook her by the shoulder, speaking in her ear, and she dropped her arms, stared up into Sally's face with starting eyeballs. "Don't you

go speechifyin' about dem screech-owls dat a way," she shuddered. "Dat ain' no annymile; dat's de hant-cry. Don't you hark to it?" As the innocent bird outside voiced his admiration for his mate, in a low, whickering note, she grew frantic, deaf to reason and clung to Sally's skirts with both hands. "Dat hant-cry! Dey's a-comin' fer me! Dey's boun' fer to git me!" she wailed.

There was nothing to be done with her. She crouched on the floor moaning, "Don't send me back to my baid. I'll be hant-rid. Lemme sleep by yore do'sill, Miss Sally, ma'am." She was so frantic, so deaf to reason that Sally was afraid Mrs. Ellen would hear her, and for some instinctive reason she wanted to shield the poor, superstitious thing.

"All right, you may stay, Maria," she agreed. "You can take the couch there—"

Maria sat up, a trembling mass of fear. "I don' want no baid, thank you, ma'am," she breathed with a glance behind her towards the hall. "I jest wants to sit still and feel safe. I'll lay back on dis yere rug twell de day dawn and de sun of rightness arise."

She would not budge from that, though Sally tried her best. She accepted a couple of pillows from the couch and seemed more than thankful. Sally undressed rapidly and slipped into bed, very tired with the long, exciting day. Her last sight of Maria was a dim bundle on the rug with its outlines lightly sketched by the faint moon-beams.

Her mind was a jumble of ancient gems, crowns of dead queens, and the ivories of the Van Dirks.

The sun falling across her face woke her and she sat up, wondering where she was. The strange room confused her for a moment. Then she glanced hastily towards the door-rug. Had she been dreaming last night, or had it actually happened,—that scene with Maria?

The sunny breakfast-room back of the dining-room was full of the fragrance of roses. Miss Cynthia had been gathering them for table, mantelshelf and buffet. Mrs. Ellen smiled a welcome from the steaming coffee-urn. Maria, in fresh cap and apron, waited sedately by her elbow for the cup she was pouring. Everything was bright, colorful, and friendly. Last night was left behind among the shadows of the past.

Mrs. Ellen was in high good spirits. Her face clouded only once and then but for a moment, when Sally pointed out a red canoe on the river.

"I think you should know, Sally, that the young man you call Mr. Dukes is Philip Van Dirk," she said, putting two lumps of sugar into Miss Cynthia's second cup of coffee. "He quarreled with his grandfather, the late Colonel Henry, and would not acknowledge himself in the wrong, I believe. He preferred his atheism to his inheritance. If he had respected his grandfather's beliefs and not ridiculed the spiritual life, he would have been master here,—the last male Van Dirk. As it is, he has the tenant-house and Minerva Paltz'

services and fifteen hundred a year,—not so bad for a young man with low tastes, I consider."

Her frankness was without appearance of rancor; she seemed impartial and just. The memory of Philip Van Dirk's mocking manner and the doubtful taste of his message to a dead man prejudiced Sally; she wondered how she could have had that first flash of liking for such a person. She was eager to show Mrs. Ellen that she regretted her part in that painful jest but she could not bring it up again. All she could do was to make herself as useful as possible, in a place where everything was already carefully adjusted to smooth running.

Mrs. Ellen gave her some letters. "Here is something you may do for both of us," she said with a smile that showed all the little spaces between her white, short teeth. "The Post Office is near the tavern. You might take a walk about the village. It's a pretty place, though very quiet to one accustomed to a large city. After Philadelphia, Olympus is certainly not exciting."

Sally ran up to get her own letter and plumped into Maria who was coming up the back-stair like some apparition evoked from a dark bottle. The narrow, winding stair was so hid by the angle of the museum wall that Sally had not known it was there and she started. "Why, Maria," she said.

Maria eyed her gloomily. She followed Sally into the bedroom, where she laid a small plain safety-pin on the bureau. "I done found dis yere

pin in my close dis mornin', and I brought it back whar it belong," she said monotonously. She seemed to be waiting for Sally to open the subject of last night's incident.

"Who is Mr. Philip Van Dirk?" Sally asked, determined not to revive the matter. "He lives next door, doesn't he?"

Maria brightened. She had been gossiping with colored neighbors since her arrival a fortnight ago. "He's a good young man," she asserted. "He's eddicated and he's right smart to poor folks, dey says. Mandy Jones wuz kitchen-he'p here when de ole Cunnel was alive, and she say Mr. Phil he jest did suttinly dote on he grandpaw."

"What did he quarrel with him for then?" Sally demanded, hunting for her stamp-book in the drawer where she had thrust her writing-pad yesterday.

"When de ole Cunnel took to talkin' wif de hants, what he called by de names of his ole frien's, Mandy says Mr. Phil done his best to break him off. He done some science tricks to show de ole man dem hants of hisn wasn't real. And jest as he was esplainin' how he'd mannafacktured dem fake hants, de ole man tuk his fit, and he nuvver open his mouf to Mr. Phil agin. He jest hung on long nuff to git ole Mr. Jacksum, what wuz his best frien', to write him down a new will . . ."

"Maria, have you aired my room?" Mrs. El-

len's voice came from the front hall, very distinct and cool.

Maria shrank visibly and vanished, muttering excuses, as Sally, with the stamp-book in her fingers, went out with her letter. Mrs. Ellen was standing by the stair-head with her mail in her hand, and her wide smile a little set, like a painted smile that could not fade. "My dear, you must keep Maria in her place," she said suavely. "Those old house-servants are sometimes rather too familiar for our northern standards. She was Mr. Jeremy Norton's sister-in-law's little maid and has been in the family ever since Alice died. Don't let her chatter, for she is full of mis-information. The Post-Office box is 29; here is the key. Thank you so much. Don't hurry back."

She called down to Sally at the front-door. "Please be sure to get the note to Mr. Jackson off at once. He will wait to hear from me before he comes."

As Sally went briskly down the secluded street, Philip Van Dirk met her. He bowed with exaggerated politeness. "Good morning, Miss Shaw," he said clearly. "A charming morning for a stroll."

He looked so gay and amusing that she halted impulsively. "Why didn't you tell me your real name," she asked.

"Because I knew sooner or later that fact would be thrust on you," he replied airily. "Why lavish words on a truism?"

She made an impatient gesture and one of the letters flew out of the pack. The wind caught it and carried it into the grass at his feet. It was the note to Mr. Jackson. She moved to him, holding out an eager hand. "What a blessing it didn't fall into the gutter," she said, receiving it from him. "It must go in the next mail. Mr. Jackson is coming down tomorrow if he gets it." She had not meant to say this; it seemed as if the words popped out of their own accord. It was stupid to explain to a stranger.

Philip looked sharply at her. "Jackson coming tomorrow? Give him my love," his tone grew light again, "and say I'll see him after he has done his duty."

"Indeed I won't carry any more messages," she cried, helpless against his more engaging manner. "I won't. Not after this . . ."

"I know you'll do it," he remarked maddeningly. "You're a reliable party. How did Mr. Van Dirk receive my respects? He is well, I hope?"

Her friendliness dropped from her. "You knew perfectly well he was dead," she cried, hotly. "It was horrid of you."

"Yet they say he has been seen there, nevertheless," he retorted coolly.

She walked off, disliking him exceedingly. She mailed the letters and took a roundabout way that led her to the crest of the slope on which the village lay. She forgot Philip Van Dirk as she looked about her. The face of the land about her reflected

the minds of the men who had wrested it from the wilderness, as land always does, and it was a new face to her.

To the south lay the swamp-lands with the scrub-patches on their low hummocks,—a land given over to ready inlets, bare lonely levels, humpy hillocks of coarse grass,—a land lawless and unashamed. Before her the village spread out in the sweet June sunshine, thrifty, somnolent, with its best houses on the hill-crest to the north and its feet in the broad-flowing river. An old village with an active past to prop its self-esteem, set in a country passed over by the tourists and with only a handful of wage-earners left among its comfortable cottages.

To the north it joined another rambling old village, once an estate of the patroons. At the south it ended, beyond the Van Dirk stables, in a few crumbling boat-houses and small boat-yards, some decaying shacks and the coarse grass of the swamps. A dark line of low cedars wound, like a dull thread in an embroidery, up from the Van Dirk stables to the humpy commons. "A lane," she thought, and wished she had time to find its upper end and go back to Riverside that way.

When she reached Riverside by the short-cut to the green-walled road, Mrs. Ellen was not visible. Miss Cynthia sat knitting, counting with lips pursed, oblivious of all the world. Sally stooped to look at the sweater she held, of

ugly dark grey. "Who is it for?" she asked.

"Cousin Ellen," replied Miss Cynthia with pride. "She likes black, I suppose, but black comes off sometimes in the summer . . . on your clothes, I mean—"

"Can you tell me the way to the ferry?"

The voice was gay and laughing, a rich contralto. A good-looking girl, golden-haired and silken, was smiling up at them from a yellow-and-grey sports car. Another girl, less resplendent, sat beside her frowning slightly.

Miss Cynthia stepped to the edge of the portico with her knitting in her apron. "Turn to the right after you pass the factory and you'll be there at once," she said affably.

"Are you Mrs. Van Dirk?" the girl asked, with almost insolent familiarity.

"Oh dear, no, I am only a—a guest," Miss Cynthia laughed. "Do you wish to see Mrs. Van Dirk? I can call her. She is lying down—"

"Oh dear, no," the girl consciously or unconsciously used the same tone. "I am only a—a stranger, passing through. Thanks very much. The first turn to the right. Yes."

They drove off, leaving Sally wondering why the other girl looked so disdainful of her companion. The girl who drove did not look at the other until they were out of sight, then she said sharply, "Don't be a flat tire, Claire. They won't know who I am."

"The car will give you away," Claire returned

impatiently. "They'll know you were spoofing them."

"And then?" The tone was cool.

"And then Philip will find out you've been poking about."

"You will please leave Philip out of the picture," the girl said imperiously. "You're entirely too much interested in Philip."

Meanwhile Miss Cynthia was saying that she liked to see girls going about as they did now. Up in Center Bridge in her girlhood, parents had been too strict. Then she broke off to call Sally's attention to the queer dog-like heads that grinned above the papyrus-bundles that formed the bases of the tall columns.

"Heads of Anubis, the Egyptian god of the mummies, no, of embalming," she explained with a line on her smooth forehead. "They are really jackal-heads. That particular Philip Van Dirk was queer, you see, always searching out odd things. He built the laboratory at the back of the hall there,—I'll show it to you after a while. He never found the way to embalm like the old Egyptians did. He wanted to have his body sent to a friend in Egypt, Cousin Ellen says, but of course they wouldn't do any such heathenish thing."

"Why not?" asked Sally. "He had a right, didn't he?"

"It would have been a scandal," Miss Cynthia shook her head. "His son Henry, the late Colonel, buried him in the family lot and they say he never

rested . . . that is,'' she looked confused and broke off to point to the roof of the portico. ''Go down the steps, my dear and look at the head in the medallion up there. It is the Egyptian goddess Ma-at, the goddess of truth, with her ostrich plume. A very good sort of a figure-head for any house.''

Sally looked up at the medallion. ''She looks like a good-natured person,'' she commented. ''I'm glad to know who she is. I thought she was a portrait of one of the Van Dirk ladies.''

Miss Cynthia laughed. ''Bring your chair over here,'' she said, indicating a shady corner. ''And I'll tell you about the Van Dirks, I've been reading family diaries and getting all sorts of news about them since I've been here. They are a most amazingly interesting family.''

She chatted on and Sally listened and, when Mrs. Ellen joined them, there was more anecdote and tradition. When Sally ended the day she knew more about the Van Dirks than she knew about herself. If her head had been filled with the Van Dirk treasures when she had laid it on the pillow the first night, it was overflowing with Van Dirk loyalties and obstinacies and whims when she crept between the sheets that night. She forgot she was in a strange room without the girls to look after and to cuddle. It was like living in a story-book.

Mrs. Ellen and Miss Cynthia paused in the hall on their way to their respective rooms. Mrs. El-

len was worrying because Miss Cynthia had taken no nap that day. "You must go to bed at once," she was insisting.

"I don't sleep well if I nap in the daytime," Miss Cynthia's gentle voice was firm. "I have to take bromide if I nap in the daytime."

Then they discussed the best methods of fighting off insomnia, and while Miss Cynthia was declaring that counting sheep made her twice as wakeful because she would sit up to count on her fingers, Sally drifted off to sleep.

The clock was striking twelve in deep, measured chimes when she waked. Someone was going along the hall,—a light, soft step. Miss Cynthia sleepless, going to the medicine-chest in the storeroom that she had mentioned that afternoon.

Sally was accustomed to rouse at a sound for the brief ailments of Aimee or Janet who shared the same room at home. She was out of bed in a trice and at the door. As she opened it carefully, the footsteps beat a retreat down the hall. Just as she reached the jutting corner of the museum door they faded into silence, and the door of the room they called the laboratory shut with a creaking sound. She stood undecided for a moment and then tiptoed down the hall.

"Are you sick, Miss Cynthia?" she whispered through the keyhole.

A soft whisper answered after a tiny pause. "No, dear child, go back to your room. I am all right."

"Let me come in and talk a while. That helps a lot when you're nervous." Sally's earnestness made her bold. She hated to know that anyone was uncomfortable.

The key clicked in the lock and the same whisper came through the crack. "Go to bed, or I shall be quite cross with you. Pleasant dreams."

Sally turned away. She had done all she could. Miss Cynthia was used to living alone and evidently preferred to fight her insomnia by herself. She decided to go back and insist on massaging Miss Cynthia's head; that would soothe her, if anything would. She had tried it on her mother many a time.

As she opened her door again, she was conscious of a figure stealing past in the darkness. She shrank back, for it sounded like Mrs. Ellen's heavier step. But as the footsteps passed onward, she involuntarily followed and had a brief glimpse of a figure as it turned the angle and was outlined dimly against the uncurtained oblong of the back window. A slim, bent masculine form with an odd square thing on its head!

Her heart dropped a beat but her feet,—inquisitive Shaw feet,—carried her a few steps. The figure silently opened the storeroom door and vanished. Philip Van Dirk's words about Mrs. Ellen's late husband flashed through her mind and she leaped back into her room and shot the bolt.

For a whole minute she stood panic-stricken and then reason began to work. She tried to piece

together all the fragments she had gathered. The burglar alarms disposed of the fear of a thief. That was all right. She took testimony of herself, —she had certainly seen the same man go into the laboratory door yesterday afternoon. Miss Cynthia's assurance that there were but three people in the house might be sincere, and it might be—

Miss Cynthia was coming back along the hall. A wave of relief flooded her. She would meet her and clear the mystery. She sprang to her door again but when she had opened it, there was no one there. The little lady must have got to her room with amazing swiftness. No doubt she had hurried like that to avoid rousing Sally again.

Sally went back to bed but got up at once. She felt very much alone and she was too warm. She must get some air. She put her head out the bathroom window,—because the sliding-screen there allowed more freedom,—and drank in the freshness of dew-laden spaces. A light was burning in the tenant-house and the twinkle came through a little break in the hedge, a warming, companionable bit of light.

She went to bed then and fell asleep at once.

And while she slept the same soft step crept carefully along the hall outside her door, going from the storeroom to the front of the house where it became merged into the night-noises of trees and river. After a long space of time, it passed and died into the back hall, not to come again.

Chapter IV

THE BOOK OF HOURS

MISS CYNTHIA at the breakfast table looked surprisingly fresh and pink-cheeked for a victim of insomnia and, to Sally's astonishment, she answered Mrs. Ellen's inquiries about her night's rest with the assurance that she had never slept better. On thinking it over, it seemed probable that she spent most of her nights in wakefulness and might consider the few hours she had got last night quite sufficient for the easy life she was leading at Riverside.

When Mrs. Ellen gave her the letters to mail, Sally asked if she should begin the work of the book-shelves that had been suggested at breakfast. Mrs. Ellen smiled on her, and her face, with its full brown eyes, had the faintest resemblance to a benign frog. "You may begin on the library after you have your walk," she said. "Don't leave things about, though, for I shall receive Mr. Jackson there this afternoon. Now run along; it is too bright a day to stay indoors."

After she had been to the Post Office and delivered the mail to Miss Cynthia on the portico, she

remembered the dark cedars she had seen from the commons. Old John, the occasional gardener, grass-cutter and handyman, happened to be at the tool-house bringing out the lawn-mower. He stopped readily enough.

"The name of that there pathway, as you call it, is generally Graveyard Lane; though its real name is Smuggler's Alley," he replied, wiping his tobacco-stained mouth on the back of his hairy hand. "Fancy-thinkin' folks want to call it Cedar Road, but it don't take somehow."

"Did smugglers really come here?" she asked, much interested.

He grunted and spat sideways. "All sorts of folks come here in the old days,—Mr. Henry Hudson, fr'instance. And the whalin' men that brung their boats to safe harbor up yonder," pointing vaguely northward.

"But real smugglers?" she persisted. "Did they come here?"

"Smugglers there may hev been and smugglers there may be, but I'm a law-abidin' man and I don't go about astin' fool questions," he returned with an acid look.

She felt she had offended him. "I like the old name best,—it has a creepy sound—"

"Much you know about it," he interrupted rudely. "Knee-high to a grass-hopper, and pickin' and chosin' names! What I say is, if them smugglers hed got sight of you, they'd a et you up and never knowed they'd had a meal," and he moved

away with a great clatter of the mower, chuckling at his own wit.

The dark little up-and-down lane, with its thick rows of junipers shutting out the sunshine, led by an over-grown ancient cemetery, ran down hill past a clump of alders and mounted towards the commons. At a turn she came upon a small shack made out of odd lumber and old tin put together with great care and neatness. A green vine had been trained over the door and there were white curtains at the windows. A large sign in big black letters was posted by the path . . . DANGEROUS—KEEP OUT!

"Dynamite," she said to herself and passed at a respectful distance. She lost sight of it at the next dip of the road. The track merged into a deeply rutted road at an angle where a tumble-down tavern squatted desolately among the low hills. A slatternly woman was shaking dirty bits of carpet in the bare yard.

"Can you tell me where this road leads to?" Sally asked, smiling at a couple of children who scowled in return. "I don't know this part of the country."

"Depends on where you want to go," the woman spoke grudgingly. "Down there, you'll git lost in the swamps, and over that way you'll land in the brick-yards. Five miles, they are."

Sally had had enough. "I think I'll go back the way I came," she said, as much to herself as to the woman, who had begun to shake the carpet

again. As she glanced back she got a picture of desolation that stayed with her and made her quicken her steps. Smuggler's Alley was not the romantic path she had expected.

She soon lost sight of the dismal spot and, after she had passed the dynamite shack, began to get her spirits back. The sun shone, the birds sang, there were patches of wild flowers among the hollows. She stopped on a low summit and looked away to the southward. Down there, far away, Andy would be busy in the Works,—his last day. . . .

"You choose strange places to walk, Miss Shaw."

It was Philip Van Dirk again. She had halted by the rock where he lay reading but she had not seen him until he spoke. She stared at him as he rose. He was wearing an odd square cap. The figure in the hall last night had worn such a cap. The ghost!

"It was *you!*" she cried, amazed out of all discretion.

"And you were the person who was snooping about," he returned coolly. "Were you very much worried about your friend?" and added in a stage whisper, "Go back to your room, dear child. I am all right."

For a second she was flustered. Then she grew suddenly clear-headed as was her way in emergencies. "You've been coming in there all the time," she accused him. "Frightening poor Ma-

ria. That's what you meant by the Ethiopian nation."

He waved the matter aside. "Now that we have met,—for the third time, I begin to like you, for you appear to have that rare commodity called horsesense. Most girls of your age would have broad-cast this little incident. I perceive that you kept it to yourself and you are going to keep it to yourself. Congratulations. But,—one good turn deserves another,—let me warn you about these swamp roads. They are not healthy."

In spite of her indignation, she began to admire him; he was so sure of himself. She did not mean to be too meek, however. "They look all right," she remarked, pacifically.

"Looks aren't always to be trusted," he admonished her. "I'll tell you what," he got up and put his book in his pocket. "I'll take you down past there on the river. It's really awfully fine at this time of year. Oh, you'll be perfectly safe in my canoe. I've a medal for fancy diving."

"It isn't that," she explained. "I can swim myself. I was thinking of the time."

"On a special errand?" he demanded sharply. She could see that he had an execrable temper.

"No, just out for a walk," she was forced to confess.

"And your conscience insists that you keep on your feet the whole time?" He was sarcastic now. "Well, a canoe is no place for pedestrian exercise,

—unless you hang them over the side for paddles." As she laughed, he softened, "I'll bring you back whenever you say. Come, the lower landing, where I have left my boat today, is just below here."

She could not hold out; the river beckoned and the inner imp was nudging her to go.

The landing was below the last out-building of the Riverside estate, and they glided out from the weedy shallows without any chance of observation from the many windows of the mansion. Not that she meant to conceal anything from Mrs. Ellen, but somehow it seemed easier to speak of Philip Van Dirk as in the past. The blue crests of the mountains hung in the distance, always at the same spot, though the nearby shores changed with every dip of the paddle, as they passed the fringes of boat-yard and hovels and came swiftly to the border of the swamp-land.

Her quick eyes caught a little inlet, where a broken landing-place was half hid by reeds. He saw her looking at it.

"That's the place which old John loves best of all the countryside," he remarked with a twinkle of fun. "He's quite a fisherman,—ask him sometime what he catches down here."

For a second she thought he really meant that the old man came with hook and line; then she understood it was a parable. "He's much too cross to rouse," she said seriously. "He almost took

my head off about the name of Smuggler's Alley."

He was not listening to her. "Let's have a straight talk," he broke out, and brought the canoe into the mouth of a smaller, more hidden channel that lay close beside the landing. "You saw me last night, didn't you?"

"I didn't know it was you until I saw that cap," she nodded at the square-topped cap he had thrown in the bottom of the boat.

He did not speak for a short time and then he looked her deep in the eyes, with his strange intent pale gaze. "Can you keep another secret? A real one. Until I tell you to speak?"

Very soberly she replied, "I can but I'd rather not. I'm Mrs. Ellen's guest, you know."

"I've gone too far to keep quiet," he said, impatiently. "I want to tell you that I came to put back something that did not belong to me,—something I had borrowed. I shall never come again. Or, at least, not until Mrs. Van Dirk insists upon it. I have been working a few laboratory tricks on Maria,—to scare her out of my path, but she can rest easy now. I'm through. I give you my word never to frighten her again."

She had to believe him, and promised to keep what he had told her secret. "I wish Mrs. Ellen knew you," she remarked thoughtfully. "I'm sure she would like you better—" she broke off, realizing her blunder.

"I don't ask for her compassion," he pushed off

with an abrupt shove. "Pity is a contemptible emotion. I'd rather a man knock me down than pity me." He was growing excited and reckless. "The only flaw I find in Christianity is too much pity. Only a weakling endures pity or feels it. I shall experience everything, so as to understand everything, but I shall never feel pity for anyone."

"I know where you got that," she cried, suddenly quite at ease with him. "We had *'Who's Who in Philosophy'* last term. Nietzsche. I think he was an awful crab. He went crazy, anyway."

He flung back his head in mirth. "A critic,—at fifteen. No, don't tell me you're older. It's the brain that counts." He sobered. "How do you like Riverside?"

"Perfect," she responded out of her whole heart. "If I only had the family here, I'd feel it was heaven."

He made her tell him about her family, and then he said, reverting to his own affairs. "That house was made for men, not for a prejudiced woman. I bet Mrs. Van Dirk looks like a peanut in Grandfather's carving-chair with the side-board back of her. It takes a strong man to fill that seat."

"I suppose that you would fill it perfectly," she laughed and then wished she had not spoken. It might hurt him, the dispossessed.

He looked out over the wide river as he swung the canoe into its landing-place. "I don't know. I have the conviction that it would make me look

like a preaching Puritan. The proper Van Dirks are all big, ruddy men, like the portraits in the hall—''

''Portraits? There aren't any in the hall,'' she broke in. ''Only a photograph of the Coliseum by Moonlight.''

He did not reply. He handed her out of the canoe with his grand manner full upon him and his dignity was so genuine that she could not intrude any empty words upon it. He had said he hated sympathy. She thanked him and hurried off towards the mansion, glad that the mystery had been cleared up. At least, not entirely cleared up, but partly explained. She knew now that Philip Van Dirk was to be trusted.

In the upper hall she met Maria who was cleaning the back rooms. Impulsively she went to her and began, ''Maria, those noises in the hall—'' She stopped, for she could not tell her baldly that she had been told they would not come again.

''Dem ghost-es,'' muttered Maria. ''Dey got me, bofe sides.'' She glanced sideways at Sally. ''I ain't goin' stop yere nights no mo', Miss Sally, ma'am. Ise goin' to lodge wif Mandy Jones and come back yere at sun-up. I cain' jist mek up my mind to go splang off . . .'' her voice trailed dismally.

''You don't have to go,'' Sally told her earnestly. ''There aren't going to be any more noises.''

Maria shook her head. "Hit's dis a-way," she explained, her mind fumbling over a joke of the late Mr. Philip Van Dirk. "Ef I leaves Miss Nellie, Mr. Van Dirk say he shore gwine to hant me. And I says, I don' want no private and pussonal hant, which follers you wharsome-ever you goes. I'll resk de promiscus ones, every time. 'Caze dem promiscus hants ain't jest atter *you,* dey's jist out a-hantin' gineral-like and kin overlook you, 'specially ef you's a dark complected lady, and effen you keeps you-self outn de way. Dat's why I likes to keep de illumination in de back hall turned down. Yassm, I prefers gash to elepticity whar dere's ghost-es a-walkin'—"

"But, Maria, "Sally had to speak firmly to stop the rapid flow of words. "There aren't going to be any more ghosts. I am sure. Positive."

Maria meditated, with her tongue in the cavity. "Deed, I ain't figgerin' on associatin' wif no hants, no-how," was all she would say. It was difficult to understand how much she believed of Sally's promises. She was evidently revolving some problem in her mind.

Sally glanced into the laboratory through the open door. Maria nodded gloomily. "Look all you desire, missy, hit's nothin' much to see,—cans, and jugs, and foolishments, I calls 'em," and she began her cleaning again.

Sally looked about. It was a well-equipped laboratory, better and larger than the one at High-school. She wished she knew something

about chemistry. She had taken only the most elementary work. A scrap of paper on the floor by the closet attracted her. It looked out of place in the neat room and she stooped, picked it up, was going to throw it into Maria's dust-pan as she passed but, hearing Mrs. Ellen's voice in the front hall, forgot about it and stuffed it into her pocket instead.

"Bring some dusters and things to the library, please," she said to Maria as she hurried by her. "I'm going to begin on the book-shelves at once."

She flung off her dress and slipped into a big apron that Mrs. Ellen had given her. It was a deep rose color and she looked very well in it. She stopped at the bureau to take a view of herself and saw in the mirror not only her smiling self, but the dress she had thrown on the chair behind her, with the contents of the pockets spilled on the floor.

"Stupid," she said, and caught them all up together,—a note from Janet, the bit of paper, and some stamps she had bought that morning. She flung them on the desk; no time to fool with them now. She'd do that later.

Maria found her in the library and delivered the tools of toil. "I ain't got no more ammonier," she showed a few drops in the bottle. "But ef dat grocery gemman gits yere, I'll fotch it right splang off. Dem fust shelves is right clean. Hit's de next book-case what's potty black wif dust."

Sally made good progress, though it was hard to keep from reading the books as she dusted them. She did peep into a few while the shelves were drying and laid aside one for her own pleasure. The grocery-man did not come. Mrs. Ellen bustled in about eleven o'clock to advise her to take a rest; she seemed concerned lest Sally overwork.

After she had gone out, Sally finished the shelf she was cleaning and then took a book and curled up in the deep chair by one of the windows, half-hid by the heavy silk hangings. The warm air came in from the green out-of-doors and the birds in the ash-trees were sweet to hear. She was tired, and after the excitement of last night, and gradually, in spite of her interest in her book, her eyes closed and she fell asleep.

She did not know how long she slept. Voices were in her ears, a deep masculine voice and Mrs. Ellen's firm tones. Was she dreaming? She lay relaxed, only half awake.

"It was accepted by Joris Van Dierck as security for some very large sums loaned to his dear friend the Duc de Severne for the other refugees," a deep masculine voice was saying in the dream or reality, which ever it was. "And when both men died within a week of each other, Joris left his lawyer strict injunctions as to the Book, of which none of his family knew him to be possessed. It was always to be held secretly by the

one male heir who succeeded to the property."

"Men are so secretive," Mrs. Ellen's voice was amiable.

"It was to be held in secret," went on the deep voice, "unless claimed by a descendant of de Severne, who must repay the sum of money advanced by Joris to the cause . . ."

At this point Sally realized that she was fully awake. It was plain that the voices belonged to the owner of Riverside, and her lawyer, who must have arrived ahead of time. She rose, pushed back the chair and moved around it, making as much noise as possible.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the deep voice.

"Sally!" cried Mrs. Ellen.

Sally blushed. "I was asleep," she said. "In the chair. Oh!"

A book lay on the small table between Mrs. Ellen and her guest. A book so beautiful that Sally's eyes would not leave it. It was not large but it shone with golden clasps, with jewels in its ivory cover, with rich reds and blues. A wonderful book.

Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Ellen looked at each other. "She has seen it, my dear madame, and may as well hear the story," Mr. Jackson said. "It will impress upon her the need for secrecy on her part."

"I suppose so, though I myself have heard but half," Mrs. Ellen agreed reluctantly. "And if it had not been for your generosity, I might never

have known that such a treasure was in the family, much less in this house."

"I will explain to the young lady," said Mr. Jackson, after the introduction. "Sit down, Miss Sally, and listen well, for it is an unusual tale. I consider it remarkable from every point of view."

He went over the part she had heard about Joris and his will, as he touched the Book with careful fingers. "No one has seen this treasure for many years," he declared. "In fact, we may say that we three are the only living beings who have laid eyes on it. But I am forgetting another one. Yes, Phil saw it once. His grandfather showed it to him just after the fire. Phil sent in the alarm and worked like a demon and saved the house. The fire started in the cellar. And Colonel Henry showed it to him as a reward and also because of the heart-attack—his first one—that took him that day. He was afraid he might pass out without revealing the existence of this treasure."

"But you knew of it, surely," Mrs. Ellen objected. "So old a friend and his lawyer beside."

Mr. Jackson shook his head. "Never heard a breath about it until my friend had gone," he said solemnly. "Phil posted over to the hospital where I was half-dead—an auto accident,—and told me where to look for it. A square lad is Philip, for he knew that his grandfather had made a new will in his anger and that he was cut off. He will never own it now."

"I think it is much better to sell it to the Cluny

Museum, as you are directed by the will, than to have it in the hands of an atheist," said Mrs. Ellen, primly.

"Phil's no atheist," Mr. Jackson replied quickly. "He's bit sore on everything just now, but that will pass, that will pass. He has a sense of justice, and was willing the de Severne heirs should have it, if they could have been found. Now, let us look at this priceless bit of old France, for it is soon to return to its native country. The Cluny has written me that its representative here, M'sieu Martel, will take it in his charge, while the examination is made, and I am taking it to him today. That is why I came in the morning. I am to meet him this afternoon at three."

He opened the stiff covers of the gorgeous book and showed pages of the old angular French black-letter, with the initials rich in gold and color, and with marvellously wrought miniatures of sacred subjects on some of the pages. Mr. Jackson touched the leaves with the joy of a connoisseur. "Virgin parchment. Finer than vellum, as vellum is finer than ordinary parchment. It's like that old missal Henry used to keep in the museum. Yes, a priceless book."

Sally gave a little cry as he turned the second page and showed a gap where leaves had been cut out. Only a few pages remained and most of them were mutilated. "What a pity," she breathed.

"Not at all," he shot back. "The man who did

that was Henry Third of France! His name is on the margin . . . see . . . " They craned to read the lightly traced letters. "He gave it to one of his mother's 'Flying Squadron' of beauties, the Duchesse de Severne."

He gave them a picture of the whimsical Henry with his scissors at work, while the St. Bartholomew fires had hardly died and his mother, Catherine de Medici, plotted; how he kept an army of attendants for his little Lyonese dogs, two thousand dogs, and how his people starved while their king cut up rare works of art to suit his fancy. Sally was thrilled but the owner of Riverside drew down her brows.

"I care little for these royal follies," she said severely. "I'm glad, however, that it will not fall into the clutches of that Philip. The money will be far better spent on the Blind Asylum, a worthy charity indeed."

"And for the purchase of the Bone factory," he added, with a keen glance. "It will fetch a great sum, no doubt. Sufficient for both bequests. Small hope for Phil getting it, since he can only receive it after it is refused by the Museum and yourself, Mrs. Van Dirk. The factory will take a stiff sum, I'm afraid. Staffern is making good in a small way, much better than that sore-head Jack Van Dirk who started it. And now," he said, looking at Sally, "we will all keep this secret of old Joris' until the Cluny accepts it and the money is paid. I feel responsible, as my dead friend's law-

yer, for having shown it to anyone, and I must insist on absolute silence on your parts. I know I can rely on you, Mrs. Van Dirk, and you, too, Miss Sally. I can see that you are reliable."

He smiled at her and there was a generous light in his faded blue eyes. Sally liked him immensely. She liked the way he tossed back the white lock on his lion-like forehead, the way he spoke about Philip, and the deft motions of his large well-shaped hands as he put the treasure into its old wrappings.

"And Philip Van Dirk will never have it!" The words burst from her involuntarily; she could have bitten her tongue off when she saw Mrs. Ellen's look of surprise.

"Phil has some of the ivories," replied Mr. Jackson, busy with the outer coverings. "A will is a will. Phil is too high-spirited to let people know whether he cares or not. Minerva tells me he is studying hard and seems quite cheerful. A pity you cannot know him, madame, for he is a fine fellow."

"I am content to follow the instructions, as my late husband would have been," Mrs. Ellen said in a noncommittal tone. "Sally my dear, now that we have ended this matter, will you ask Miss Cynthia to come down? Mr. Jackson says he used to know her long ago."

Sally rose at once, and, after a hearty handshake from Mr. Jackson, ran upstairs, filled with what she had seen and heard. It was hard not to

burst into descriptions of the Van Dirk treasure when she got to Miss Cynthia's door.

Miss Cynthia was in negligee with a cap on her head, and showed horror at the summons. "My dear, I simply can't go down," she protested. "I've washed my hair and put it in crimps—I thought it looked too plain—and I shan't be able to take it down till it's dry. I don't recall any Mr. Jackson at Center Bridge."

When Sally returned to the library with a modified message, the lawyer and his client were saying goodbye. They seemed on good terms with each other, and he was inviting her to some festivity.

"You must bring Miss Cynthia and this young lady," he added as he tucked the green bag containing the treasure under his arm. "Tea in my shack. It'll be cool, no matter what the mercury says. It is not a social affair. Just a chance to see the work of a young friend of mine. A few who understand what a painting should be."

After he had gone Mrs. Ellen turned to Sally with a sprightly air. "No more work today," she raised a warning finger. "We must all look our best for the tea on Friday. An artist is critical of the exterior," she added hastily, "though the Heavenly Father looks into the heart. I shall not wear black. It makes me look sallow. Tell Maria to have lunch at once. I shall have to go to town this afternoon."

Sally obeyed, though she lingered to search the

shelves for the book which Mr. Jackson had mentioned, which she had not been able to find in the museum. It was not there and she soon forgot it in rummaging among the other books for something to enjoy during the long sunny hours of leisure.

After lunch Mrs. Ellen came along the hall dressed for her trip to town. She wore a light embroidered summer gown and a small white hat. Miss Cynthia, who had her lunch upstairs because her hair was slow to dry under the cap, exclaimed with pleasure as she saw her. "I've never seen you in color, Cousin Ellen," she said. "You look wonderful."

She glanced down at her own grey lounging-robe and an odd expression came over her face. "Color makes such a difference," she murmured.

Sally followed Miss Cynthia into her room. She wanted to talk about the studio tea, but the little lady seemed far away in mind. She took off her cap and shook down her plentiful pale hair. "I think black is a hideous color," she said, looking at herself with disdain in the mirror.

"You'd look sweet in lavender," Sally heard herself say, though she had no idea why she chose lavender when she really thought pink would be more becoming to the small face framed in its waving aura of hair.

"Lavender? Do you—would you—I've never worn colors since mother died ten years ago. But . . ." she broke off to look at herself. Then

said abruptly, "This Mr. Jackson. I recall him now. He spent a summer at Center Bridge. He was a charming young man, so tall and slim. The girls were all interested in him."

"And you?" Sally's eyes sparkled.

"My dear, I knew him only slightly," Miss Cynthia said with dignity. "We sang in the choir together on Sundays and he dined with us a few times. I shall tell Cousin Ellen I am not going to the tea-party. Now you had better go lie down. You look as if a doze would do you good."

Nothing more was said of the invitation. Mrs. Ellen came home in a rather gay humor and declared the town was cooler than the country. Miss Cynthia seemed a bit quieter than usual but was cheerful. Sally had spent the afternoon in the portico with her book and her head was filled with it. She had not changed from the pretty bungalow apron nor been to her room, so deep had she been immersed in her story. She slipped into the music-room as soon as the meal was over and spent the early part of the evening with her book. Maria came in to close the windows at nine and she looked so cheerful that Sally remarked on it.

"Deed I ain't skeered of no hants anymo' " she declared valiantly. "I done got a rabbit-foot off'n ole Mose today, and when I lays mah haid on de pillar dis night I kin trust in de Lawd wifout fear. Good night, Miss Sally ma'am. I'm going right up."

"I'll put out this light," Sally promised, knowing that the two ladies were upstairs, chatting on the tiny iron balcony that opened out of Mrs. Ellen's room and would not come down again, unless something called them.

She read on, and came to the grievous yet triumphant end, and stumbled out of the room, switching off the light as she went. She hardly noted that Maria's room was unusually quiet, nor that a storm was coming up.

The wind howled along the heavy over-hanging eaves of the old house and the windows showed rifts of wan light among the fleeing black clouds that swept tumultuously across the troubled sky. Once a big star shone out and was quenched, like a familiar voice stilled before its message could reach the heart.

Sally could not sleep. The long hours of reading had made her wakeful and filled her with fantastic fears. She missed Aimee and Janet. Some strange foreboding crawled at her heart and magnified the menace of the hour. She lay there, telling herself that Miss Cynthia was close at hand and Maria, too, living human beings. She shut her eyes resolutely and began to say a verse from the Calendar of Cheer. . . .

"Whoo-oo-eee!"

A wild, weird, wailing moan broke the undertones of night. It rose and fell, and ended in a clatter of electric bells, an uncanny, piercing chime.

Chapter V

COB-WEBS AND SUBSTANCE

SHE was in the corridor before she knew it, facing the back-hall from whence the sounds came.

They ceased as she halted. The sharp click of a key in the lock of Mrs. Ellen's door came from the front; Miss Cynthia's door opened and Miss Cynthia, in knobby hair-curlers and armed with an ink-stand, rushed out.

"Stand back," she cried. "I'll go first. Call the police, 374 Woodbine. Quick!"

Sally flew to the second-floor 'phone and snatched the receiver. "Wait till I come," she called to Miss Cynthia, and at that moment Maria, clad in a pink, soaked blouse, staggered out of the laboratory and fell at Miss Cynthia's feet.

"Help! Help! De's a-killin' me!" she screamed. "De ghost-es am atter me!"

"Who hurt you?" demanded Miss Cynthia fiercely. "Tell me where they are."

"Dem ghost-es. Dem ghost-es," panted Maria. "Oh, my Lawd a-massy!" and she collapsed on the floor.

They dragged her to a sitting posture and held

her firmly by the shoulders. Miss Cynthia was terrible in her wrath. "Tell me, was it one man or a gang?" she said, quietly, clutching the heavy ink-well more firmly in her small right hand.

Maria rolled her popping eyes and took a long breath. "Twan't no man. 'Twar dem ghost-es," she chattered. "Jest as I lay hand on de do'-knob, dey sot up a-groanin' and a-ringin' de death-bells in my years. Ise got my summons. Ise a-gwine to pass over Jordan . . . Yassum. Come quick, O Lawd!" and she rocked herself in an abandon of terror.

Miss Cynthia's expression changed. She set the ink-stand on the floor and got to her feet. "What were you doing in the laboratory?" she asked sternly. "What right had you—"

"Warn't in no labbeltory," gurgled Maria. "I wasn't nuvver near no labbeltory. Dem ghost-es jest jumped out at me, *splang!*"

"You were snooping and set the alarms off yourself," cried Miss Cynthia, all her wrath centering on the unlucky Maria. She glared at her, "You've been out in the rain, too. Do you think we have no eyes?" She shot out the words like bullets.

Sally put a hand on Maria's arm and tried to persuade her by softer means to tell the truth. Maria stuck to her tale of ghosts; explained her soaked state by the fact she had leaned out to close the windows of her room, and ended by becoming stubbornly silent.

"We'll see those windows," Miss Cynthia declared, and she led the way to Maria's room.

The windows were tightly closed.

"All right, I'll believe that much," said the just little lady. "But there's something more in it . . ."

"She'll have to know about the burglar-alarms, won't she?" Sally asked. "She'll be telling all Darktown about the ghosts."

So they led her, reluctant and trembling, to the laboratory door and explained the workings of the alarm. Her face, which had been bathed in the sweat of terror, was wreathed in smiles when she saw they had told her the truth.

"My golly, huccome I nuvver knowed dat contraption wuz dere," she asked in admiration of the device. "I done clean dat floor and nuvver made him howl yit."

"I wouldn't proclaim that," said Miss Cynthia, still severe. "It doesn't speak well for your thoroughness. Tomorrow I shall advise Mrs. Van Dirk to explain the entire system to you, or else lock your door when you go into your room at night. We don't want to be roused from our beds by your nonsense."

She stalked off to her room, again clutching the ink-stand, and shut her door firmly after her. Sally lingered.

"You mustn't say anything about this to a soul, Maria," she said very impressively. "Promise to speak to no one."

Maria promised, almost too eagerly. Sally could see that she was already bursting to unbosom herself to Mandy Jones. She must be restrained.

"Listen to me," Sally said, and the memory of one of Aimee's pranks was with her. "If you tell anyone, *anyone,* about these burglar-alarms, you'll see worse things than you've seen tonight. There'll be writings on the wall of your room. Remember, not a word."

Maria rolled her eyes in innocent surprise. "Who? Me? Miss Sally, ma'am, Ise de most untellin'est pusson you ever see. I don't nuvver speechify 'bout nuffin. Trus' *me.*"

Sally had to be satisfied. "Well, I warn you. You'll see a fiery writing on your wall if you do," she declared. "Now, go to get those wet clothes off. Good night."

"Good night and thank ye kindly," Maria responded in a dismal tone. "I ain't lookin' fer no fire-writin' on my wall, though. Ise a deep water Baptist, and I don' tell no Satan-lies. No-how." She was in her room when she popped out her head. "I brung dat ammonier when de gemmun was yere in de liberry dis mawnin'. Hit's on de dest in yore room."

Sally went towards her room and the funny side of the incident suddenly struck her. She began to laugh softly to herself; Maria in her soaked pink silk had looked so ridiculous. The click of Mrs. Ellen's key made her hurry forward.

The door was opened as she drew near and Mrs. Ellen called out to her.

"Have they gone? Did you get the police? Who was it?"

She flung the questions out in one breath. She stood, pale and shaking, with one hand clutched to her breast; and Sally saw with amazement that strings of diamonds dripped from her fingers and sparkled through the laces of her lounging-robe. Directly behind her, in the ornamental border above the lower wall-panels, a small door stood open, showing a recess with tiny shelves, a wall-safe of Victorian simplicity.

"Did they get into the museum? Tell me . . . tell me . . ."

Sally explained that it had been only Maria, going about to close the windows against the storm. Her eyes were feasting on the glittering jewels as she spoke, and Mrs. Ellen came to herself with a start. She held out the mass of gold and gems, with a little deprecating shrug.

"You see, my dear, what it is to have family jewels in your care. I was afraid to go out, lest the thieves should get at them. I stayed to guard them," she said, growing quite calm. "They are rare stones, old mine-diamonds in this chain," she indicated a heavily set necklace, "that were my mother's. The rest were given me by my two devoted husbands. Ah, they are full of memories."

She showed them with justifiable pride, and

Sally, who loved the sparkle of any gem, learned that there were wide differences in value among diamonds of the same size. Mrs. Ellen's collection, though she could hold it in her two hands, was a fortune in itself. Small wonder she had hesitated to put them in jeopardy by opening her door.

"I shall take them to the bank tomorrow," Mrs. Ellen said, as she returned them to their cases and began to put the boxes into the wall-safe. "I realize now how foolish it is to keep them here, in spite of the wonderful system of alarms we have. Yes, I shall certainly put them in the vault tomorrow. Now, you must sleep, my child," she added kindly. "You've lost your beauty-sleep but you can make it up in the morning. Don't get up too early."

In her own pleasant room again, with the lights on, Sally felt no inclination to go to bed. She must do something to make herself sleepy. A letter to Andy. That was the very thing. She sat down to the desk and pulled out some sheets of paper with the Riverside stamp on it. The bottle of ammonia, which Maria had spoken of, stood precariously on the blotter, and she reached out her hand to take it, meaning to set it safely on the floor.

"Whoo-eee!"

She started and laughed. It was the little owl again, coming out after the storm. Then she gave a low exclamation; she had over-turned the am-

monia-bottle and the rubber cork had been knocked askew. A thin stream of ammonia was meandering over the papers on the blotter.

"Stupid!" she said and caught up the bottle, shoved the cork securingly in the neck, and set it on the floor. The liquid had not gone beyond the blotter, so she lifted the brown pad and carried it to the bath-room, intending to pour off the ammonia, before she threw the moistened papers into the waste-basket. The bath-room light was a mantle-burner, very strong and bright, and as she snapped it on, she kept her eyes on the writing-pad, not to spill the fluid on the floor.

The scrap of paper she had picked up on the laboratory floor this morning lay on top of the letter and stamps, and, to her profound amazement, words were written on it wherever the ammonia had touched it. A secret writing in red fluid!

She flung the pad on the wash-stand and held the paper to the light. "Of the hours" she read and then made out, "search . . ." She got the bottle and poured the ammonia and read, "Search the next . . ." The edge was torn here but the next line gave her a clue. "Third chamber . . ." Then some blurred figures and signs, no doubt a cipher. It must be a set of measurements to direct a searcher after the Book of Hours!

The third chamber . . . counting from the laboratory, that was her own. She sat, trying to bring all her powers on the problem; she went

over the facts. She had picked up the paper that morning. Maria had cleaned the laboratory the day before, and would have seen any paper, had it been there then. Whoever had dropped it, must have been there in the night. The searcher had been directed to the third chamber, her room, as the next to be searched. Philip Van Dirk! The name leaped to her lips. "No, he wouldn't! He couldn't be so base," she breathed, "And besides, it's someone who doesn't know that the Book of Hours has been taken away."

She decided after much pondering not to take the paper to Mrs. Ellen until morning. Since the unknown intruders were after the Book of Hours, —and it was plain that they had disturbed nothing in the museum or other parts of the house,—it would only be alarming her in vain. She locked her door, pushed a chair against it and sat in the darkness by the window, watching the torn clouds scatter before the wind.

Chapter VI

A SCRAP OF PAPER

WHEN she came down with apologies for her lateness, she found an empty breakfast room. Maria told her both ladies had gone to Albany for the day. She had a message from each.

"Mis' Van Dirk, she say don't w'ar yore-sef out by a-wukkin' too hard," she said, setting down rolls and coffee before Sally. "Miss Simpher ast me to tell you secret-like, dat hit's better not go a-scarin' Miss Nellie 'bout las' night. And I says, she sure talks words of wisdom. Yassum. Better a deef ox dan a lyin' tongue, saith de Lawd, as de Palmist says. Miss Sally, ma'am, you ain't goin' to git me inter trouble wif Miss Nellie, is you?"

Sally was too tired to care much about trifles, as the matter now appeared. "I'll not tell unless you do, Maria," she replied, rather sternly. "But you'd better take care not to get any more cobwebs on your head when you walk around at night."

Maria's hand went to her immaculate cap. "I —I—yassum, I sure did git messed up in dem store-room windows," she agreed glibly. "I'm a-

gonna give dat chamber a reel good scrub dis very day.''

No more was said. It was hopeless to try to get truth from this ardent Baptist. Sally took her hat from the rack in the niche behind the music-room, and pulled her head into it as she went down the portico steps. She simply could not stay indoors. She meant to go for the mail and then find some nook on the river-bank where she could sit and think. Her brain was no clearer this morning than it had been at dawn. It seemed to her, as she passed them, that the heads of Anubis on the pillars smirked at her.

''I'm getting silly, thinking about all this too long,'' she told herself. ''I'll have to take a good long walk. This air ought to blow the c—'' no, she would not say the word *cob-webs* but substituted, ''nonsense out of my head.''

There was no mail for the house, only a short letter for her from her mother telling of the offer from the company at the Works of a higher salary if Andrew would stay. ''We feel gratified, and I think the architectural firm will value Andrew's services more, though he will not tell them of the offer, of course, being just installed and all that.'' Sally put the letter in her pocket, feeling happier, for it was good to know that dear old Andy was appreciated.

On the steps of the Post Office she hesitated. Which direction should she choose for her tramp? The upper village did not tempt her, be-

ing so close a replica of Olympus; the tree-clad hills back of the town looked darkly mysterious, and she was fed up on mystery: she would go to the humpy commons where there was a fine view of river and mountains. She went briskly, for the air was crystal-clear after last night's storm and had the breath of the mountains in it.

She took another path than the one she had walked before, and came very shortly to the cabin with the danger sign. A man and woman were before the door in the sunshine and their faces were as cheerful as the morning. Sally recognized Minerva Paltz, whom she had seen occasionally about the tenant-house but never had the chance to meet face to face.

Minerva Paltz was a pleasant, rosy, soft-fleshed woman of about thirty and her voice was as amiable as her face as she exclaimed, "Ach, it is the young lady from the house, that Mr. Philip was telling of, Amandus. Let us ask her to have a glass of the buttermilk that I have brought."

Sally went forward, glad of the encounter. She hoped to get news for Miss Annie, of whom Janet in her note had reminded her. "I know who you are, for I heard of you before I came to Olympus," she said. "Miss Annie Demutz, at the Post Office at home, asked me to let her know how you were."

"Ach, that Annie," beamed Minerva, shaking her sleek head. "I have written many letters . . . but, Amandus, you must speak to the young lady.

He is so shy of strange young ladies," she added to Sally. "Mr. Fosbanner, it is."

Amandus Fosbanner, a short, broad, stubby man somewhat younger than Minerva, was a Pennsylvania German who had come up among the descendants of the Dutch to look for a job in the Bone Factory. He had thriftily proposed to Minerva when the Colonel had been taken ill after his quarrel with Philip when there were rumors about the town as to the faithful Minnie's probable legacy. Minerva had taken him gladly, for, as she frankly said, it was better to be married to a *dumkopf* than die an old maid. Amandus had a thin voice and a timid heart.

"Please to mek your acquaintance," he said hastily and turned to look at the scenery, while Minerva disappeared into the neat shack and returned with a brimming glass of fresh buttermilk.

"If you would set while you drink," she suggested, motioning to a wooden bench by the door, "I will tell you about that Annie. She is never writing to me, though I send many letters. It is sad for old friends to fall apart so."

Sally sipped the buttermilk, which she disliked exceedingly, and put a few random questions as to Minerva's health and happiness. She felt somewhat embarrassed by the round blue eyes pinned on her every movement. It was a relief when a chance mention of Philip Van Dirk brought a flash of emotion into Minerva's placid face.

"My, Mr. Philip is fine to me," she declared warmly. "He's better than them that talk about him, yes, many times better. Whose fault is it that he is a bit lordly? He was brought up to think folks dirt under his feet. But he's don't stick to that, no! He is friends with all, if they've got ideas, he says. Ideas are bread and meat to him, yes indeed."

Amandus turned from the scenery. The enthusiasm about Philip seemed to bore him. "Mebbe she'd like for to see the presents I give you," he suggested in an undertone. "I got ten minutes yet and women is pryin' animals."

Minerva's face was wreathed in smiles. "Yes," she cried, beaming on Sally. "She'll like that. So many presents he has give me. All here to see. All so handy when we begin our farm the next year."

Sally was interested but a little surprised that the prospective bride should keep her love-tokens in this distant spot instead of in her own hands. She was more surprised when Amandus flung open the door of the shack and began to exhibit the gifts,

"A plow," he explained with relish. "I got him at de sale last week. Andt dis corn-sheller, he's 'most new; he cost expensive fer second-hand but he's good. Ya."

Minerva smiled on the hoe, the decrepit lawn-mower, a luxury, as Amandus said and fit for any lady, and three wooden gates that made up the

collection. "Ya, it will be fine, when we make the farm. All will be good."

"And there vill be more, mebbe so," cried Amandus, carried away with his own generosity. "By nex' year we git a harrow onct and a seeder mebbe. Ach, Minervy will be all in de style."

Sally said some suitable words, though she could not help thinking that it was an odd way to woo a lady. "But is it safe to keep them here?" she made a gesture to the sign DANGEROUS—KEEP OUT. "Aren't you afraid they may get blown up some day?"

Amandus looked at Minerva and she looked at him. They pursed their lips, breathed hard. "Ach, it's not so resky," muttered Amandus, adding quickly, "Not for us folks. It's difrunt for us yet. We know how to—to manich things. Ya."

"Ya," echoed Minerva.

There was a moment of silence. "Now must I run to the factory onct," Amandus pulled out a huge silver watch from his overalls. "I'm late a'ready, talkin' with strange women. Please to meetcha. Call agin," and he was off, hurrying on his short legs and swinging his long arms like a windmill.

Sally waited till Minerva had shut and locked the door. She would not venture on the subject of the explosives, having seen what effect it had. Besides, she was more curious about Philip Van Dirk.

"Your Mr. Philip seems to be about at all

hours," she remarked. "I see lights in your house all night. It's nice to know that someone else is awake when you're up yourself."

"He's the great reader and studyer," Minerva cried, with a return of her cheerfulness. "He's inventing things. Yes, a process for whitening bone it is. He talks to me of it every once and so often."

"Bone? I thought it was ivory that the Van Dirks were crazy over," Sally exclaimed.

"Ivory is that," Minerva answered. "But it's chemistry that got into his head and, ya, ivory too. To make white and to keep white, that's what none can do. He will find the way. He is so steady."

She warmed to her subject as she lingered, and told Sally the story of the quarrel; how the old Colonel had worried Philip by his taking to seeing ghosts and trying to make Philip see them, too. "And he forgets that Mr. Phil had learned magic tricks, from the day he was twelve,—till he could do any magic he wanted. And Mr. Phil could tell when other people did a trick. He would say, 'That's a ten dollar trick' or 'that's a five dollar trick,' like that." And so Philip had tried to cure his grandfather of his spirit-fancies by raising a ghost of his own making, and when the old gentleman had seen the figure walking along the hall and had cried out, "Now, by Jove, will you believe, you young cub," and pointed to the figure, Philip had told him that it was just a boughten trick.

"Ach, the poor gentleman, he was that wounded in his pride that he would not speak to Mr. Phil again, though he besought him on his knees. He left him bare, as you may say, for what is fifteen hundred and the little house to him, after all he's had, and him engaged to a high-toned lady like Miss Betty Evans, too."

She talked on and Sally got a new view of Philip, that of a proud yet compassionate nature, more hurt than angered by the circumstances in which he found himself. Minerva ended her praises by a bit of wisdom that sounded more like her employer than her own homely speech.

"Many who talk against him wouldn't be half so good, if they was in his place," she declared. "You don't know what's in folks till it's brung out by chance. Like the chemicals running over bits of bone and paper; each turns his own color, that's what trouble does for humans."

Sally watched her going back across the commons and then she glanced at the sign with its black glaring letters. "I'd rather take her word about Philip Van Dirk than Mrs. Ellen's," she thought. "She surely knows him through and through. I wonder why they were so queer about the dynamite? They didn't hesitate to ask me inside. Another mystery. Or perhaps part of the same one."

She began to walk homeward, dwelling on the matter as she went, but could make nothing of it. She felt refreshed by her walk and went at the

library shelves with a vim and, as she had a solitary sandwich on the portico, wasted no time over the work. When the clock struck five, the task was done, and she had cleared her brain of cob-webs.

Mrs. Ellen came home first. She was in high good humor and brought a gift for Sally, a pretty, inexpensive lace collar. She spoke of meeting Mr. Jackson by chance at the Ten Eyck where she had lunched. He was with a charming Frenchman, whom he had brought over to her table and introduced as M'sieu Martel. He and the lawyer had struck up a friendship, it seemed, and had met today for pleasure after yesterday's encounter for business.

"Of course, we said little of the Book," said Mrs. Ellen. "So many people about. It would have been indiscreet. I noticed one man in particular who appeared too much interested in our conversation. He moved from a table by the wall over next to us. A very stylish man with the look of Philip Van Dirk. In fact, I thought it was he at first."

She did not mention the diamonds and went immediately to her room to rest before dinner. Miss Cynthia came in half an hour later. She had a number of packages; Sally did not know how many, for she had got to her room and dumped them behind the door when Sally encountered her as she came through the hall. She greeted Sally warmly and then, apropos of nothing, said, "I've made up my mind to go to the tea, after

all. Pictures are very stimulating to the intellect. I've seen so few. And I love them so."

Her excitement about the tea had taken her breath. Sally knew how she felt. She, too, was thrilled when she remembered she was to go to a real studio to meet a real artist. The eternal feminine question rose up and confronted her.

"What are you going to wear?" she asked. "You look sweet in your white linen, now that you wave your hair."

"White linen!" Miss Cynthia fairly snorted contempt. "At a studio party? Most assuredly not. I'll show you after dinner." She began to shut her door. "By the way, you didn't mention to Cousin Ellen the fact that Maria had been out last night?"

"But—" began Sally, incredulous.

Miss Cynthia tiptoed close and spoke low. "Her shoes were as wet as her dress, and she certainly had been out-of-doors. I traced her wet foot-prints to the laboratory door last night but as it had shut itself after Maria, I did not want to send the alarm off again by going farther. This morning when I went there, Maria had been before me, the foot-prints had been wiped up. See if you can find out, without her knowing. There must be some place where the alarms do not work."

She laid her finger to her lips and tiptoed into her room. Sally had forgotten to tell her of the scrap of paper. Suddenly she resolved to tell no one. She would wait till she saw Philip Van Dirk

at his boat-house loitering about the river-bank as was his after-dinner habit, and then she'd manage to meet him; a man would know what to do.

"I'll get the paper and show him," she thought and went back for it.

The desk-lid was locked as she had left it but when she opened it, the paper with signs upon it was gone! Her desk had been hurriedly ransacked, and ink was spotted over the pad where the intruder had up-set the ink-well and tried to sop it up with the loose blotters. A single thumb mark on the leather edge of the pad was the only trace the searcher had left.

"They've been here," she whispered, with a creeping chill. In broad daylight, with the sun shining, the unknown hands had been at work.

She sat down, rather sick. All around her in the pleasant room she heard voices, sensed presences that crept and pried. The old Colonel's belief in ghostly appearances seemed more reasonable; perhaps there was something in it . . . she jumped up. She would not let herself go in that direction. "I'll find Philip and tell him right away," she said. "I won't wait, or I'll be a worse goose than ever."

A private border at right angles to the road at the side, separated the front lawn of Riverside from the back premises. When she slipped out the music-room door she passed unnoticed to the huge ash-tree in the evergreen wall, where, among the twigs of arbor-vitæ, she found a place easy to

scramble through out on to the road, and saw Philip Van Dirk at once.

He was standing under the twin ash-tree on his own side of the road, staring up into the thick mass of leaves and branches that made a perfect arch between the two old trees. He started when he saw her, and then made a warning gesture.

"There's an oriole up there," he whispered. "First time they've built here. Come over slowly and I'll show you."

She stood beside him with her neck craned as she poured out her story in a breathless undertone. He kept the same position as he put his questions in the same low voice.

"You say it had the words 'of the hours' and 'Search all places' and some queer signs?" He frowned for a moment and then, "Great heavens it's some old stuff of mine. I'd forgotten it completely."

"Yours? How did it get there?" She was quick enough now.

"Must have dropped it out of some old book when I was in there the other day," he replied. "It has nothing to do with the Book of Hours if that's what you're thinking. I was testing all sorts of invisible inks long ago,—just before—before I left Riverside. In fact, before my grandfather's illness."

He stopped so long that she said, "Yes," but he went on, his eyes still on the arching ash boughs.

"It's merely some sort of formula that I was trying to get out for—well, for my own study. I remember it perfectly now. I thought I had burnt all that trash when I left."

He looked so unhappy that she felt sorry for him. The memory of his "science-tricks" brought painful scenes to his mind, she could see that. Sympathy being forbidden, she was merely grateful.

"I'm so relieved," she murmured. "I was pretty well scared—"

"Wait a bit," he stopped her. "What about your desk? You say there's a finger-print. Can you bring it to me? I will be here after dinner again."

She promised eagerly. Minerva Paltz had strengthened her confidence in him, so that she had no fear of betrayal, but only of help such as she could not get from anyone in Riverside. She left him still intent on the oriole's nest,—a little bag hanging to the tip of a branch not far above his head.

Maria lay in wait for her and beckoned her into the pantry. She was in an odd state, between embarrassment and anxiety. "Please, Miss Sally, ma'am, hev you seen a bit of paper? Hit's a letter. I done drapped some-whar in dis mansion, and I see you pick up somepin yistiday in de labbeltory."

"It wasn't a letter," Sally was rather short with her, for she at once knew who had ransacked

her desk. "That was something else. It had nothing to do with you."

"But please, Miss Sally, ma'am, lemme lay hand on it, 'twell I see ef it ain't my letter," Maria was beside herself now. "I swars on de Book dat I ain't sassin' you none; but I jest got to put my hand on dat letter."

"You can't see it, because it isn't there," Sally explained. "It was only a bit of blank paper, anyway."

"Is you shore of dat?" Maria's wrinkled forehead relaxed. "Den I mus' hav throwed it in de fiah wif de yuther waste-basket scraps. I wuz plum scared you'd see dat letter," she added, with a coquettish smile that even the lost tooth did not dim. "Hit's my boy-frien' Tip as wuz writin' to me, and his communicashums is nachterally private and pussonal."

"Well, don't rummage through my things again, even for your love-letters," Sally tried to keep her face stern. "I'll tell Mrs. Ellen next time."

" 'Deed I ain't been to yore dest, cross my heart, wisht I may die," Maria was injured innocence to the life. "I don't nuvver tetch nobody's private and pussonal goods."

Sally left her protesting loudly. She did not believe her, of course, for had she not proved herself a ready liar about her rain-soaked dress? She thought, "I'll show her the thumb-print and that

will settle her. How Philip Van Dirk will laugh at me, when I tell him!"

What a needless fright she had given herself. That was the result of looking for trouble; if she had not been thinking of mystery and romance, she'd have known there was nothing to it.

"Well, I won't have to take the finger-print to Philip," she thought. She called him Philip to herself, though she spoke of him as Mr. Van Dirk. "I'll get it, though, or Maria may beat me to it. She's not so guiless as she looks."

"My dear!"

It was Miss Cynthia's voice. Her door was ajar and Sally peeped in.

"Oh!" she exclaimed and forgot Maria and her perjuries.

Miss Cynthia stood, with her cheeks glowing and one hand pressed to her heart, from head to foot in delicate lavender; even her pumps were of violet-grey to match the fur scarf about her shoulders,—a demure, elderly figure in a staid costume that even Center Bridge would have approved.

"You're lovely," cried Sally. "Where did you get such becoming things? You must have spent oceans of money on them!"

She hated herself the moment the words were out, they sounded impertinent and mercenary. But Miss Cynthia did not mind; she smiled happily down on her decorous skirts and put out one small buckled pump.

"Yes, I did spend a lot, but I didn't want to put Cousin Ellen to shame," she remarked cocking her head to get the sparkle of the steel buckles. "I got the half-yearly rent for my cottage last night; and I made up my mind to have one good time. I've been so saving all my life. Isn't the wrist-bag too cute, with the amethysts on the clasp? Of course they aren't real but they look just as well . . ."

She looked up at Sally with shining eyes. "Violet is such a lovely color. I'm glad it goes with green, for we're going to be together tomorrow at the tea, you know. You mustn't desert me. I should be quite scared among the stylish, clever people who'll be there."

"I'll need you more," laughed Sally. "I've never been to a real tea-party, much less a studio tea. But," she added with a deep breath, "I'm going to have a wonderful time, now that—that everything is all right."

"Yes indeed," the other responded joyously. "You'd have had a poor time with an old black crow on your hands. Color makes such a difference."

Sally felt tempted to tell her of the anxious time she had been through but it appeared so silly now that she decided to keep it to herself, for a while, at least.

"I wonder why she is going into town in the morning again," she thought, as she looked over her dress and things for the next day. "She must

have forgotten something, though she looked pretty complete to me. Mercy, I'll have to wash those white stockings or wear the brown ones. I've been taking it too easy . . ."

Chapter VII

TEA AND OTHER THINGS

"I'M glad it's cool, so I can wear this grey fur," Miss Cynthia observed complacently. "I can't get used to wearing fur in summertime. I feel so queer, like wearing your under-flannels to a Fourth of July picnic. Only of course, furs show more."

It had turned cold over night; one of those swift changes from languid summer to crisp, invigorating weather. Miss Cynthia stood complete, hat, gloves and all. She did not look so radiant as Sally had expected.

"Do I look all right?" she asked anxiously, pushing a tightly waved strand of hair under her toque. "Not too dressy for my age?"

"You look fine," Sally assured her. "Don't fuss about your hair. It will be lovely when you learn how to manage it. People always say you've got to get the hang of a permanant."

"I hope so," sighed Miss Cynthia. "But I ought to have waited. I realized it when Cousin Ellen stared at it when I took off my hat at lunch. I feel as if I had a bushel of loose hair-mattress

under my hat. It's amazing what a difference it makes."

"Like color," laughed Sally, taking a look at her own green lace in the long pier-glass. "Don't you remember, that's what you said about Mrs. Ellen. Color makes such a difference. Has she seen your dress?"

Miss Cynthia shook her head. "She never comes in my room. She's very reserved, you know. Not like the women at Center Bridge. They ask the most personal questions. But they're great church-goers and ready to nurse anyone who falls ill. They never spare themselves."

"You always see the good in people," Sally said, settling her plain little white sports hat. She wished she had a wide-rimmed one but it was only a passing wish that did not dim her pleasure in herself. Green was a nice color and she had always admired the lace dress, and never dreamed of having such a fine frock. "You find something nice to say about each one."

"I do try," confessed the other. "It's because I am so selfish. I want to get all the pleasure out of life I can, and noticing the nice side of people makes me comfortable. Now, let's go down. I do hope Cousin Ellen likes my dress."

Mrs. Ellen had just reached the foot of the stairs as they came down. She waited for them and though she looked at them, it was evident that she saw them only as through a glass, darkly. "I have had such a time with this dress," she ex-

claimed plaintively. "The fitter told me all the snaps were on and here I've had Maria sewing for an hour. I thought I'd be late."

"But it's beautiful!" cried Miss Cynthia. "Such a wonderful color."

Sally murmured her admiration, for indeed, Mrs. Ellen had chosen well. It was a pale flat red of simple cut, with some bold embroidery in the same hue at hem and pocket. Her slim figure, her heightened color and animated air gave her an amazing semblance of youth. Sally had not imagined such a transformation possible.

Mrs. Ellen's irritation passed and she felt herself for a fleeting moment once more the beautiful Miss Browne. All human beings have at heart some such flattering pictures of themselves. She took time to examine their costumes and to compliment them on their appearance and they started for the city in great good-fellowship.

The door of Mr. Jackson's entrance-hall was open, and a hum of voices greeted them. Sally had a glimpse of twinkling candles on a lace-covered table, a gleam of gold, and a whiff of flowers and subtle incense, as Mr. Jackson ushered them into the ante-room.

"This is fine," he said genially, shaking hands all around. "Mrs. Van Dirk, you are a picture, indeed you are. Miss Sally, you're as fresh as the morning. And you, Miss Dean, you remember me now, don't you?"

"Of course," Miss Cynthia was already intoxicated with the unaccustomed gaiety. "We used to sing together, long ago. You have kept up your voice, I hope. Such a beautiful baritone."

"I pipe a bit now and then," he replied, much gratified. "We'll have to try some of those songs some time. Here comes Nardov, my genius. I must introduce you all."

An extremely good-looking young man with large, kind, thoughtful eyes came up, smiling. Miss Cynthia gave a little gasp, for he wore a dark violet silk smock, and there was a large carved amethyst on the first finger of the hand with which he smoothed his sleek, black hair. Sally felt rather shy before him.

He bowed over Mrs. Van Dirk's glove, took Miss Cynthia's little hand as if touching a flower, and shook Sally's hand like a comrade. Mrs. Van Dirk was delighted with him, and began to talk art, with a capital A, at once. She knew nothing of the modern schools of painting, but she owned some expensive old South American "Rubens" and "Van Dykes" and had once taken a few lessons in oils.

Sally and Miss Cynthia strayed after them, as some newcomers claimed the host's attention. "He's quite charming, isn't he?" Miss Cynthia whispered. "But I don't understand these paintings. They're so—so—splotchy. I guess artists see things differently from us,—they lead such ro-

mantic lives. This is his studio, I suppose. Or, at least, it's the studio that Mr. Jackson has fixed up for him here."

Sally looked at the painting, all blots and blobs of gay color, labeled, "Girl in Garden" and felt uneasy. She could not have said why. Perhaps because the face looked like a drowned face floating among flower-petals. "It's gorgeous," she ventured, and then turned to take her first real view of the studio.

It was a plain, big room with a north-light and some easels and screens at one end. It was dressed for this occasion with a few big palms, a large gate-leg table loaded with the massive silver tea-service and a number of comfortable chairs, brought in from the other rooms. A pretty girl in bright blue-and-silver was pouring coffee from the shining urn. As she handed a cup to the young man bending over her, Sally recognized her.

"Look, it's the girl of the yellow-and-grey car," she exclaimed. "Isn't she a beauty!"

"And there's the other one, talking to young Mr. Philip Van Dirk," supplemented her companion, all interest at once. "I think I like her looks better. She seems more—well . . . human. The other is just like the girls in the cold-cream advertisements. In the magazines, you know. All neck and eye-lashes."

Philip saw them and came over at once. He was dressed in shabby clothes and had a bad cold, and was consequently not at his best. Sally introduced

him and he appeared to take to the little lady from Center Bridge at once. He seconded her views of Nardov's art.

"He calls them 'The soul of things' but I consider them merely a bit of commercialism," he said, with a wave of his slender hand toward the score of vivid canvases that hung about the walls. "He knows the public wants to be shocked now-a-days and so he does it. He can paint, though, when he wants to. He's done some portraits . . . but let's look at Uncle Dick's things. He's the sort I like."

He led them into a small room and snapped on the lights. A number of colorful sea-studies and sturdy landscapes stood unframed against the wall. "He's more to our taste, isn't he?" he turned to Miss Cynthia, who was staring.

"Mr. Jackson? Did he do these? And he never said—" she was too much surprised to be coherent. "I love them. He used to sing but—oh, they're so *real.*"

"Good work, too, the critics say, but he won't exhibit. Too modest."

"I love them," repeated Miss Cynthia ardently.

Sally was silently devouring the paintings; she had not known how much she could be stirred by a picture. She hardly noticed Mr. Jackson's entrance at that same moment and did not see Miss Cynthia's eager start of pleasure. Their voices seemed far away.

"I'm glad you like them," Mr. Jackson was

saying. "Which one do you consider the best?"

Miss Cynthia cocked her head; she had forgotten about her new clothes and her hat was slightly askew but her face was bright and there was a flush on her cheeks. "I can't say right off," she answered with her eyes intent on the pictures. "There's so much in each one. I have to look a long while to try to find out just a little bit about it."

"Good," he approved. "You really love pictures, I can see that. Now that study of rocks and spray,—what do you find in that?"

Philip came over to Sally. "Didn't you know he painted?" he asked. "He's a cracker-jack at it. I say," his tone lowered, "I'm sorry you had a fright about my coming in. I want to tell you again that I'll never give you any more scares. Now, let's feed. Wait a minute right here, and I'll get something to eat."

Sally stood where he had left her. Mr. Jackson and Miss Cynthia were absorbed in their talk and oblivious of everything save the pictures. She was in a new emotional state, induced by the mingling of lights and colors and the subtle suggestions of Nardov's work. Though she liked Mr. Jackson's canvases better, the barbaric medley of the younger painter's pictures stimulated while it repelled her. She was ready for new impressions of people as well as things. When Philip brought her plate she attacked him gaily.

"You think you're showing that you're an an-

archist by those old clothes,'' she said, taking up her fork. ''People know you have good clothes,—I heard someone say so when we came in,—and they aren't one bit impressed.''

He looked down at his baggy trousers with a meditative air. ''You've been talking with Miss Evans, I perceive,'' he returned calmly. ''She's just been giving me the deuce for the same thing.''

''The girl at the tea-table? Is she Miss Evans?'' and she told him of the incident at the portico. ''She's perfect in that blue-and-silver,'' she ended.

He did not appear pleased. All he said was, ''She was born here.''

He left her then and she saw him go straight to the table and bend over the girl, who tossed her head and laughed. They were a handsome couple; if he had only been decently dressed he would have been more than a match for her beauty. Sally came to herself as Mr. Jackson spoke to her.

''Here's one of our younger set who can steer you about,'' he said in his hearty way. ''Claire, this is Sally Shaw. You are both young enough to dispense with formality, I hope.''

Claire Duncan recognized Sally, though she did not speak until Mr. Jackson had left them. She powdered her nose and examined it in a small mirror, wiped the excessive crimson from her full lips and said, ''Gawsh, I look like I came from the Ark, with all that lip-stick! Of course, Betty wouldn't tell me—so you're the girl at Riverside.

How do you like Philip Van Dirk? But what I really came over for, was to get chummy with that Godey lady there. I've fallen for her, hard."

Sally laughed. There was no need to answer. Action was what Miss Duncan wanted. Miss Cynthia was still absorbed in the pictures, though she was now alone. She smiled on the newcomer as she offered her hand, and the two, so utterly unlike, were soon deep in chat that somehow did not include Sally. She went into the studio again and began to look at Nardov's things.

Philip drifted up to her. "This Nardov," he muttered. "Uncle Dick lets everyone work him . . . amethysts! And he knows nothing. When I spoke of the ancient ivories of Egypt and Rome, he was spluttering all sorts of words but he didn't know a syllable about them."

"He knows his own work," Sally defended. "Everyone can't know as much about ivories as you. You were brought up on them. It's in your blood."

He laughed then and made a mocking bow. "Really, Miss Solomon?" he bantered. "Do you know, I like you more and more. There's a refreshing candor about you that is mighty nice, after the slick sayings of the pampered horde."

She felt he was chaffing her but she didn't care. He looked unhappy and he had a bad cold, and was just a bit pathetic in his bravado of old clothes.

"You ought to take some hot milk and go to

bed," she told him, as if he were Aimee or Andy. "If you will prowl around all night— Doesn't Miss Evans scold you about it?"

"What has Miss Evans to do with my health or habits?" he spoke from heights of dignity.

"I thought—Minerva Paltz said—" Sally stammered, fumbling for the right words. "I understand that Miss Evans was—"

"A friend of my childish days," he cut in. "Never listen to gossip, young lady, for it is three parts lies. I must go now," and he stalked off without a word to anyone, as if shaking the dust of the place from his rundown heels. If he had not sneezed, his exit would have been most impressive.

"Three parts," thought Sally. "Then it was *partly* true. Perhaps they've quarreled. But they'll make up. They always do." She had got her wisdom from the movies at Booneville.

Nardov had completely captivated Mrs. Ellen. His attendance on her showed that he, too, had found something worth while. They parted with a warm hand-grasp and Mrs. Ellen's slightly protruding eyes shone on the young man with bright favor. She spoke of him to Mr. Jackson as they made their farewells.

"I have engaged your protégé for my portrait, —so you will see me here too often perhaps," she smiled, with a touch of withered coquetry. "I am to come on Monday, as I wish to begin at once."

Their host was over-joyed and grateful. "You

should let him do you in that frock," he said. "It's a rare shade. It would look well on canvas."

Miss Cynthia cast a startled glance at the red frock. "It's beautiful," she murmured as before, but she seemed to see it in a new light.

In the elevator they met Philip Van Dirk and, in spite of Mrs. Ellen's strict injunctions against an introduction to 'that young man,' as she called him, it was impossible to avoid it, packed close in the tiny lift. She acknowledged him with a haughty, frigid bow, and immediately engaged Miss Cynthia in intimate conversation.

After they had parted she said sharply, "A most unfortunate person. To parade his circumstances in the public gaze as he did today. I shall consider it my duty to snub him when we meet,—if we ever do meet."

"I think he is very nice," Miss Cynthia's gentle voice had a firm note. "He was very courteous to me and that fat woman in purple silk who sat by herself. Most young men would have hung around the girls, instead of making the wall-flowers happy."

"The girls might not welcome him, if all I hear is true," Mrs. Ellen's annoyance had passed and she smiled. "He broke his engagement, I heard, when he found himself a pauper, and now that he wants to make up, she isn't quite so eager. Nardov is certainly unusual. A Russian, I suppose. Or some romantic race. He is positively infatuated with this dress. He says he will make a

master piece . . . my hair being so white . . . I shan't wear my hat, of course . . ."

Sally was silent. She had enjoyed the tea, because she liked people and had that insatiable curiosity about their manners, thoughts, beliefs. And then it had been a joy to see Miss Cynthia so happy. "She had a wonderful time," she said to herself as she laid away her precious green lace frock. "Claire Duncan had sense enough to see how sweet she is. They are going to have lunch together next week. I wonder if she told Mrs. Ellen?"

There was not a grain of regret that she had not been included in the invitation. She was too happy, too relieved of all her anxieties both as to home-perplexities and the Riverside mystery, as she called it, to want anything more than she had. She sat down to write an account of the tea in the diary that she kept for her home-letters, and her lips kept kinking in satisfaction.

"Everything is lovely," she wrote.

Over in the front of the house Mrs. Ellen stood by her wall-safe. "Perhaps I was right in not wearing the diamonds today,—such an informal affair," she said to herself. "But when I have my portrait done, I must wear as many as he thinks suitable. Family jewels ought to have their portraits painted too, I think."

Miss Cynthia, in the other suite, was standing before the pier-glass with a pucker of disapproval on her forehead.

"You look a hundred years old," she said severely to the lavender lady in the mirror. "Pokey sort of clothes they are, after all." And then firmly, "I don't care so much about violet,—it's too old-fashioned."

In the tenant-house Philip Van Dirk moved restlessly about his laboratory. When he came to a particular set of testing-tubes and retorts, he ground his teeth. The bits of ivory and bone that lay in the trays seemed to scorch his fingers as he touched them, for he flung them from him.

"It doesn't work," he muttered, "The yellow stain shows again. I've failed once more."

With one swoop, he gathered them all in his hands and dropped them into a jar of acid, where they slowly disintegrated into soft heaps. When the last bit of ivory had succumbed, he came to himself with a start. "Fool, now you've done it," he said severely. "That abominable temper of yours will be your ruin yet if you don't take it in hand. That's the last bit of material,—unless I—"

He stopped, and looked about him. The chimneys of Riverside looked at him over the green wall. To the sting of disappointment in the unsuccessful experiment on which he had based high hopes was added the memory of Mrs. Van Dirk's insulting acknowledgment of him. More bitter than Betty Evans' disdain of his democratic ideas as expressed in his old clothes, was the insult

from this newcomer, this vain old woman who had come into possession, through her marriage to a distant connection, of his rightful property. All the tumult of his untamed heart found vent in his hatred of her.

"I'll make her change her tune," he vowed, too desperately miserable to bring his philosophy to bear. "She'll hate Riverside by the time I have done. Grandfather himself would have loathed her."

He sat brooding for a while and then busied himself with some small articles which he put into the pockets of his old white sweater.

Late that night a dim figure could have been seen, climbing lightly and noiselessly up the rain-spout on the back-building of the mansion. It went to the little iron balcony of the front bed-chamber, was silently occupied there for a time and then went carefully back over its tracks, holding something in its hand which it fastened from point to point with great care. When it had dropped to the ground, it passed still with one hand outstretched, to the privet-border and up into the big ash-tree, where it crossed the firm arch of branches to the twin tree on the other side of the road. There it again dropped to earth and bent to attach whatever it held in its hand to the foot of the tree and as it stepped to the open window on the ground-floor of the tenant-house, the faint light from the street-lamp on the corner

showed it to be a man in a white sweater, who carried a roll of soft, electric wire in one hand and some sort of tool in the other.

Meanwhile Sally was sitting up in bed, her arms about her knees, trying to argue herself into drowsiness.

The finger-prints she had managed to get of unsuspecting Maria's two thumbs were not, either of them, at all like the thumb-print on the blotter. Reflecting on this new angle of the situation she finally fell into troubled sleep.

Chapter VIII

SHIN-BONES AND IVORY

"PEOPLE," remarked Philip, "are either shin-bones or ivory, the rest don't count."

Sally thought he meant to be funny and she smiled, though she did not see the point. "Do you mean their heads?" she asked.

He cast a withering glance at her, rose from the flower-bed under his window where he was transplanting some young asters and said briefly, "Come along and I'll give you a demonstration," and walked off without further ceremony.

She followed, somewhat mystified. She stopped when she saw he was making for the factory.

"Oh, but—" she began.

"Come and be enlightened." He was very nice now and she understood he was not joking.

Passing through the outer office where two shirt-sleeved clerks grinned cheerfully at him, he opened a door. "Too busy to see a visitor, Mr. Rex?" he called in.

A clear, ringing voice answered promptly, "Not at all, my boy. Never too busy for you," and Sally felt herself urged forward into the plain, orderly office where a ruddy, well-brushed man, also in

shirt-sleeves, swung around in his desk-chair. "The old man wants to know how your work's coming on—" he began and then, seeing Sally, he jumped up briskly and came over to shake hands. "Made a mistake in the party, didn't I?" he laughed. "I thought it was our inventor here."

Philip looked gloomy and muttered something about the darned stuff going back on him, and then he braced up and explained his errand. Mr. Rex nodded.

"Sure, show her the way it's done," he said. "Most people don't care how their buttons are made; all they care is that they're on the spot where they need them. You know the way around, Phil."

Sally was staring at a chart on the wall, a side-view of the skeleton of a large cow. "What a lot of bones it has," she exclaimed. "I should think you'd get a ton of buttons out of one cow."

Mr. Rex laughed. "But you see it's only the shin-bones that are hard enough to use," he told her. "The other bones are all right from the cow's point of view but we wouldn't have them for a gift. Show her the kind we use, Phil, there's a big lot just come in from South America."

They were about to leave the room when he halted them. "By the by, there's another thing you may like to see,—a piece of mastodon's tusk," and he unlocked a drawer in a closet. "There," and he laid three feet of long yellowish tusk on

his desk. "That fellow lived before history began. Buried in the snows of Siberia for centuries. Old Mr. Staffern got it when he made his trip around the world and he sets more store by it than all his other ivories."

Sally looked at the tusk which had lain buried in everlasting snows since the mammoth had perished from the face of the earth, and she felt awe and curiosity. Endless time had gnawed that bone, and kingdoms had flourished and waned,—Chaldea, Rome, the Incas, all were but a day in its long sleep.

"I'd like to have a try at it," Philip was turning it over in a gloating way. "I've a notion to crib it, just to show what I can do with it."

Mr. Rex laughed a happy, infectious laugh and crinkled his eyes at Philip. "Don't try that, my lad, or you'll land in trouble. I'd be willing to give you a chance with it, but it's the old gentleman's pet relic." He turned to Sally. "He vows he can make this old yellow ivory as white as snow, and that it will stay that way—"

"I don't say I can do it now, but I'm on the track of the process," Philip interrupted. "If I don't get it out next month . . . but that's neither here nor there," he broke off, with a warning glance towards Sally. "Put it away, Rex, 'Lead us not into temptation,' you know. Better show Miss Shaw the cameo you had carved from your own bit of old tusk. It's a curious thing for it looks like a real cameo," he added to Sally.

"The yellow under-layers make a fine background for the white outer bone."

"Don't let him look at it too long, Miss Shaw, or he'll be hankering after it," Mr. Rex said. "It isn't safe to let him see any kind of ivory, much less this old stuff."

"You're safe," Philip rejoined, taking the carved brooch from Sally's careful fingers. "It's a work of art as it is,—bleaching would spoil it. I'm no vandal."

"It's too beautiful to touch," Sally said. "I should think you'd be afraid to leave it here in the office."

"I'm not going to leave it, after today," replied Mr. Rex with a conscious look. "That's intended for a young lady. I am just about to present it to her. The old tusk is the only bit of valuable stuff that we keep here, and that belongs to the old gentleman. If it were mine—"

The telephone bell rang sharply. "Come back when you've gone the rounds," he said, hastily. "That's the call I've been waiting for. Goodbye. Goodbye."

Sally followed Philip back through the office, crossed the raised platform of the weighing scales, and descended to the cutting-room, where three or four men were busy at the lathes, cutting bone into long cubes and slicing it into the small thin squares from which the buttons would be made. Philip halted her at some barrels filled with short lengths of bones.

"This lot came from the west,—the big abbatoirs' bleaching-house out-put," he explained. "The point, however, is that they are, one and all, shin-bones. Get that firmly fixed, please."

He passed along back of the lathes with a cheery word for each of the men; he seemed a different person, efficient, chummy, alert. He hurried her through the next room, a long low, narrow place where transmission belts hummed, and a series of barrels on one side of the room turned with a slushing sound, while on the other, a few smaller barrels, set obliquely, whirled dustily. The air was powdery with pumice and bone-dust, and smelled of bone and chemicals.

"This is the polishing room," he told her. "And beyond there, where those fellows are working is the dye-room, and the other is the engine-room. I guess you've had about enough of the perfume, and you've got the idea of shin-bones. We'll get away by this door. Rex will be busy; so I'll take your respects to him another time. Jove, the air is good after the smell of the factory!"

"I thought you liked it," she laughed. "It wasn't so bad. But you didn't take me into that other part of the building," she pointed to the newer half of the factory. "Is that where they have the bones bleached?"

He cast a quick look at her. "I told you the bones came from the packing-companies' bleacheries. Some people have them done again by the

regular bleachers. Are you ready to go back? I've no more time to waste."

She understood that he did not want to discuss the matter but she was not at all afraid of him now. "I won't pry into your affairs," she said cheerfully. "Everyone knows, though, that you're inventing a process for keeping ivory and bone forever. There's Mr. Rex at the door. I'm going to stop to say goodbye. You needn't bother, if you're in a great hurry."

He was before her at the entrance and saluted the manager with his lightest manner. "Miss Shaw is now a champion of bone," he declared. "She honors the humble suspender-button above the ivory elephants of Ispahan."

Mr. Rex chuckled at her effort to explain. "There's a lot of sense in that. I wish more people thought that way. We old ivory-men would feel that we'd gone up in the world, instead of stepping down into mere money-grabbing. Well, goodbye, and come again, whenever you need a whiff of our attar of roses. Come in tomorrow, Phil, and tell us about your stuff."

Philip was grim again as they went back. He took up his trowel and stooped to his asters again, and Sally left him without troubling him with more words. He would come around again, she knew. He was like old Mrs. MacTyk, sound at heart, whatever the outer shell might seem.

She paused as she was about to cross the side-road, for the urchin was peering around the ash-

tree in the Riverside evergreen wall. "Philip Duke's afraid of spooks," he shrilled and ran quickly out of sight.

"Why does he call you Dukes?" she asked impetuously.

"Some nonsense the villagers brewed long ago out of their own thick skulls," he replied, not looking up. "One old chump told his wife that since the Duc de Severne had left his wealth to old Joris, it was his opinion the title went with it. They cling to things like that. Nothing to it."

She thought he sounded rather tart for such an ardent champion of brotherly estate as he, but made no direct reply. "The oriole's nest is gone," she said instead. "Oh, the poor pretty things. And after all their work!"

"Cats, perhaps," he grunted. "Or the wind. Or something."

He appeared most uninterested and she did not loiter. He was more changeable than she had thought him. She went more slowly towards the house and climbed the portico steps, thinking of his words about the three classes of people. "I suppose he considers the villagers neither shin-bone nor ivory," she said, with a little flush of resentment. "He thinks people are no use at all unless they are beautiful like ivory or substantial like shin-bones. I guess the cow or ox would be pretty poor things without their other bones,—even though the button-factories have no use for them."

At the portico door she said aloud, "Soup, chicken-feed, fertilizer, that's what they are,—useful, anyway. I wonder which one I am?" and she laughed a little over that. She knew she couldn't aspire to be shin-bone,—Andy belonged to that class,—and as for ivory . . . great people, historians, artists, philanthropists,—yes, they were ivory.

Then suddenly she remembered that she had meant to start her search for Maria's secret place of entrance and she went around the house, making a careful survey of each side. Maria was out for the afternoon and the two ladies were in Albany, Mrs. Ellen for her first portrait-sitting and Miss Cynthia for her lunch with Claire Duncan.

She came to the back of the house without finding any possible point not covered by the alarm-system, and was about to give it up, when she noticed the door of the summer-kitchen. It was open. Some of Maria's carelessness.

"She can't get to the laboratory in that way, though," she thought. "It isn't connected with the house."

She went to close the door and heard the orioles twittering on the tall sycamore nearby. "Poor things, they've got to build another nest," she murmured, and paused to watch their fluttering. That was how she saw the trellis.

The male bird dropped a bit of feather that wafted in slow spirals down into the honey-suckle of the arbor-like trellis by the door of the main

kitchen. She wanted to get the feather to send home to Janet, the nature-lover and she plunged her hand into the masses of honey-suckle vine in which it had dropped. The vines parted easily and she saw, behind the woodwork, a section of plastered wall. "What a queer hole," she said aloud.

It was only a slight depression in the plaster that might have been overlooked if there had not been some dull spots like finger-marks around it that showed it was not a mere fault in the plaster, such as occurred in other places near it. Like a flash all the stories of secret knobs and hidden springs rushed through her mind, and she pressed farther into the vines to search the hollow with eager fingers.

On one side was a small bit of metal sunk into the plaster and painted the same neutral hue. When she pressed hard it turned and then stopped. Nothing moved. A pang of disappointment shot through her excitement, and she shoved it back into place with more vigor. "It's an old window-buckle," she thought in disgust, and withdrew her hand.

But, no, there had never been a window here. She turned to it again and examined it closely. In the wall here was a sort of paneling done in plaster and she thought she detected a crack that might mean something. She attacked the bit of metal again; this time it moved quite around the circle.

"Oh!" she gasped

The section of wall within the panel had opened like a small door and she could see a flight of dusty stairs, overhung with cob-webs as if long disused. A narrow line of fresh footprints trailed up the middle of the stair, and in the corner of the first step lay a crumpled paper.

She was inside and had the paper and was out again and had closed the door by turning the latch backward, before she could draw one long breath. Not for worlds would she be caught by Maria, who might return at any moment. On the river-steps she unfolded the paper, trembling. It was soiled and the writing was hard to decipher.

"My rose-bud of delite," it began. A hasty glance at the signature, "Yure big boy Tip," showed her what it was,—Maria's love-letter. In the reaction, she laughed aloud.

"She dropped it when she came in the other night," she told herself, smiling. "The stair leads up into the laboratory, and she's been using it at night. She must have left the laboratory door just a bit ajar when she went out those other nights, so the alarm wouldn't work. She got caught, though, and now she's done with her prowling. I shall see that the laboratory door is shut all the time."

She walked up the path from the steps, still smiling. She could write to Janet that the River-side ghosts had all been laid, and Miss Annie need not worry about her friend Minerva Paltz' happiness. Naturally she could not tell them that the

ghost had been Philip Van Dirk, returning his borrowed goods. Nor had she mentioned the mysterious paper, nor the finger-prints. The paper had been explained by Philip himself, and she had come to the conclusion, after experimenting with her own thumbs in various positions, that the print was much like Maria's broad thumb slightly turned on its side. Poor Maria, with her young Tip!

As she went towards the portico steps, she looked up at the goddess Ma-at, and the Goddess of Truth and the Dead looked out across the river with her serene, changeless look, as if she would say, "All things are made clear by time. There is no riddle unread by the ages. Wait and be wise."

Once again Sally laughed aloud. "There aren't any more riddles," she cried. "And the ghosts have gone. People are so easily frightened!"

And she went through the wide hall and up the right-hand stair feeling wise and safe and happy: wise because she had solved the riddle of the secret stair; safe because the shadowy fear that had lurked in her heart was dispelled; happy because she had just sent home her first money-order. Her promise to Andy was redeemed and he was now with Lane and Company.

She had not much of a voice but melody was bubbling within her as she ran up the stair, and it broke out as she turned to her room. It was one of Maria's hymns, "Meet me dar, by de ribber," but she had no more than the first word on her

lips when it died. She stood rooted to the spot, staring.

The figure of a man in a square-topped cap was gliding to the laboratory door, which stood open to receive him and closed silently after him.

When her feet would move she searched all the house, storeroom, laboratory, secret stair and every other nook and cranny. All were silent and empty in the afternoon sunshine. Nothing stirred inside nor outside the old house. Philip Van Dirk's red canoe was out on the river, its bow towards home.

Yet she had seen the figure . . . without a doubt she had seen that familiar flitting figure. . . .

Chapter IX

SOME STRANDS OF THE WEB

"MONEY," said Mrs. Van Dirk, as if addressing a meeting, "is the seal of divine approval on our efforts."

"I am so glad you feel that way," Mrs. Hoorn smiled. "How much shall I put you down for? The Colonel was our best supporter."

Mrs. Ellen's benign expression did not change, though the hand she extended gripped the paper firmly as she ran an eye down the short list of contributors. "A dollar . . . fifty cents . . . and, yes, even twenty-five . . ." she murmured with evident satisfaction.

"They are our very poorest members," Mrs. Hoorn interposed quickly. "It is marvellous that they can give anything. Only great self-denial—"

"We all practise self-denial," interrupted Mrs. Ellen, as she took the pencil and wrote. "Of course, my dear husband gave his life to the cause; and I always remember that when I put my name to any list. Ah, he was a saint, if ever there was one. You knew of him, I suppose,—Jeremy Norton . . ."

"Yes, I believe so," Mrs. Hoorn had looked at

the paper before she folded it, and a flush came on her smooth cheeks. She spoke with the negative cordiality of a disappointed solicitor. "In the field in China, was he not?"

"India," Mrs. Ellen's tone was crisp. "He was in the court of the Rajah, a very responsible post. He died from overwork, though it was years later that he passed above. Yes, when I go to heaven, I shall look and see him away far, far above me, high among the elect. I shall have to look up to him."

Mrs. Hoorn did not contradict her. She rose, bowed to Miss Cynthia and Sally and spoke more formally to Mrs. Ellen. "Thank you so much for letting me bother you. Lovely weather, is it not?"

They all rose. Mrs. Ellen did not appear to notice the visitor's chilled manner, but appeared deeply preoccupied, perhaps with the image of her first husband in his heavenly robes. Miss Cynthia, with her hand in her little wrist-bag, spoke breathlessly, as if daring too much.

"Might I . . . will you . . . I'd like to help a tiny bit, too," she managed to say. "Such a good work," she held out a green note, "It's very little."

Mrs. Hoorn's face lightened and she brought out her lists again. She seemed more gratified by this lone dollar than by the five that Mrs. Van Dirk had given. As she turned the corner by the hedge, Mrs. Ellen's absent gaze hovered over her.

"It is indeed a joy to give," she remarked. "My

name ought to head the list, though. A Van Dirk should not be mixed up with the scum of the town."

"Don't they arrange them alphabetically?" questioned Miss Cynthia. "I just wrote 'Unknown friend' . . . it was so little."

Mrs. Ellen did not reply but moved to the other end of the portico, where she stood looking out to the town across the river, as if counting the smoke-plumes that rose in straight willowy lines in the still morning air. Miss Cynthia took up her needles and began to count stitches, smiling a little to herself. It was not the dull grey sweater but a gay violet-and-white affair meant for her cousin or, if Mrs. Ellen did not like it, for her own wear; though, as she often said to herself, "Violet is *not* my favorite color."

Sally watched her sitting there in the low wicker chair with the heads of Anubis staring cheerfully at her, and thought, "No, I won't worry her about that—that—*man*. Or about the secret stair. She's just beginning to have a real good time. I'll wait a bit."

Then she looked at Mrs. Van Dirk, erect, complacent, yet with an odd restlessness upon her and decided, "Nor her. Not yet. If it is a trick of Philip's,—and he might be furious at the way she snubbed him in the elevator,—it would be so unpleasant when it came out."

She sat following the graceful motions of one of the grey squirrels that lived in the big trees,

and trying to decide what would be her best course. Ever since she had seen the figure in the back-hall yesterday afternoon she had been troubled as to whom she should disclose the unwelcome fact. Her first impulse had been towards Philip: her second thought, that he might be at the bottom of the ghostly appearances, held her back. She had thought, "If he can be mean enough to break his word, I won't give him the satisfaction of knowing that he is scaring us again." So she had remained in doubt and said nothing.

Mrs. Ellen moved with her stiff, gliding gait that always reminded Sally of an iron figure on oiled rollers, and spoke with sudden sprightliness. "I must run up and take forty winks. I vow I was never so stupid in my life. I hardly closed my eyes last night. Such odd noises. It is hard for a city-bred person to get used to country sounds."

"Was it the night-herons?" Miss Cynthia asked without halting her quick needles. "Old John tells me there is a colony down the river."

"Ah, night-herons!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellen, with girlish enthusiasm. "A bird I never heard of. Do they build on roofs?"

Miss Cynthia explained that they decidedly did not build on roofs but gathered in colonies in the wooded parts where they belonged. "They are noisy things," she ended.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Ellen eagerly. "And make

such an unpleasant sound, an odd sort of groaning. Almost human."

"They don't groan,—they squawk," Miss Cynthia corrected her. "That's how they get their name, 'Old Squawk.' They—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the other. "I am glad to learn a little natural history. It was a night-heron. You must tell me more about them another time," and she threw a kiss to Sally as she glided into the house,—an unusual demonstration of affection in public.

Miss Cynthia went on with her knitting. "She must have been dreaming," she murmured amiably. "I often have dreams that are so real that I think they've actually happened."

Sally did not respond. Something in the tone of Mrs. Ellen's voice told her that the owner of Riverside had been badly shaken by that nocturnal groaning; and in a flash, as if another voice had spoken the words, she thought, "She said it was almost human. It *was* Philip, after all. He has broken his word."

Yes, the dim figure in the passage and the moans in the night were his work. His arrogant temper had risen at the insult and swept all before it,—his promise, his friendship with Sally, his own dignity. She saw it with a pang of disappointment. Thank goodness, she had not spoken.

She got up and took a turn about the portico; all sorts of plans to frustrate his petty revenge

boiled in her brain. She would set pitfalls, arrange traps, keep the alarms on whenever she could—

"Dear me, there's Claire Duncan again!" exclaimed Miss Cynthia in a flutter of pleasure. "Riding, too. She said she'd come but I thought she was joking."

Claire Duncan, on a big bay, was coming around the corner of the hedge laughing and calling back to someone unseen. Her long scarlet tie made a vivid splash of color against her white silk blouse and loose linen riding knickers.

"Isn't she pretty?" Miss Cynthia began and broke off with a gasp. "My *dear!*"

In answer to Claire's laughing summons, came Betty Evans on a fretful prancing black horse that set off her costume to its utmost,—sleeveless shirt, skin-fitting short trousers, rolled stockings all in pale pink. She looked, on first sight, a modern Godiva.

"And with a *man,* too!" Miss Cynthia's scandalized whisper died in her throat.

The trio rode up to the portico steps, gay as thrushes in the springtime. Claire introduced the tanned, cheerful young man, who seemed inclined to loiter after the few laughing words had been exchanged and the girls were ready to move on. Sally noticed that his eyes strayed continually towards the tenant-house.

"He's hoping Phil will see him riding about with his precious Betty Evans," she thought,

bracing her resentment against the breaker of promises. "I hope he does. He's home, for his boat is there and his window curtain is still down."

Claire turned the bay's head towards the street again. "Goodbye," she cried. "The next time, I'll bring a horse for you, Miss Cynthia, so get your habit ready."

They were off, with a spray of laughter and a tattoo of light hoofs, three swift riders vanishing in the glitter of sunshine beyond the ash-trees. Miss Cynthia turned shocked eyes on Sally.

"The idea of anyone wearing such garments in public," she cried. "I should think it would be like one of those dreadful dreams where you find yourself in church in your under-vest. I should simply die of shame."

"Mrs. Ellen ought to have seen her," laughed Sally. "She says all girls dress immodestly. Are you going to wear rolled stockings when you ride? Claire may be here before you can make up your mind."

Miss Cynthia was not to be diverted. "I do not like that Betty Evans. I did not like her the first time I laid eyes on her, and I like her less each time I see her. She's a cold-hearted fish."

"Mr. Lloyd seems to like her," Sally remarked, with the tail of her eye on Philip's window-blind. "He was at the tea."

"Yes, she flirted with him under poor Philip Van Dirk's very nose,—a heartless perform-

ance," the other retorted with spirit. "The best luck I can wish young Mr. Philip is that she marries this millionaire Lloyd, as no doubt she will, the minx!"

"Why, Miss Cynthia," laughed Sally. "You do dislike her."

"Very much," the tone was crisp. "That young man deserves a fine girl. He is a gentleman, and that's rare in these days when the word 'honor' is out of date."

Sally might have betrayed herself, had not Mrs. Ellen called at that moment. She looked down over the banister to say that she wanted two books from the circulating library at the drug-store. Exciting stories with plenty of action. She was hoarding ammunition to fight a possible sleepless night.

Sally searched Mr. Hoag's shelves for stirring fiction and got two fat volumes of the latest thrillers. As she passed the factory the whistle of the Albany steamer caught her ear and she paused in the open space beyond the yard to watch it being warped into the dock across the river. It gave her a sense of travel just to see the white boat with its busy bits of humanity swing in close to the distant wharf. When she turned to walk on, there was Philip Van Dirk who had come up on his noiseless old tennis-shoes.

He was bending over a tall weed that grew on the cinder-heap and he held up his hand in warning. A strange butterfly with transparent wings

like thin glass edged by a line of gay color quivered over the thin spike of blue flowers. When it flew away he straightened. "Recognize it?"

She shook her head, interested in spite of herself. "A moth of some kind," she ventured.

"Blind, like the rest of them." He was plainly in one of his tantrums, as Minerva called his dark moods. "That beauty is a stray from California. Look it up for yourself. And I suppose you know this plant?"

She had to shake her head again; her memory would not respond.

"Vervain, wild hyssop,—the sacred plant of Thor and of the Druids," he breathed in scorn.

He broke off, coughing.

"Your cold's worse," she interposed, out of long experience with Aimee and Janet. "Are you taking any medicine?"

He glared at her. "A fraud, medicine," he growled. "I'll never let those vultures batten on my sick necessity. The coroner may sit on my carcass but I'll never drop one penny into the pouches of those harpies."

"I'll ask Minerva," she said firmly. "She has some sense."

"Minerva is occupied. She is turning into a woman," he countered.

"Minerva?" echoed Sally. She postponed the matter of his perfidy until his immediate need had been attended to.

"That idiot Amandus," snapped Philip. "He

wants to put off their wedding another year,—thrifty soul. There's a girl who would take him —a consumptive sentimental seamstress with money saved. He has the amazing nerve to ask Minnie to wait until he is a widower."

Sally gasped but her incurable mania for the other person's point of view made her ask, "What does Minerva think of it?"

"She hasn't turned a hair. Says people ought to talk right out before marriage, and not put on airs. She won't let him off for his infernal vacation, though. I believe she likes him better for his speaking out. Says she had enough of soft-spoken men when she was young."

"He's a cold-blooded wretch," declared Sally. "I wish she'd send him packing."

"I believe he's right about showing her his mind, though," he suddenly became deeply melancholy. "She knows him through and through, now. We men are such a weak-minded lot and we want to please a woman so darned much that we're afraid to be natural,—until after we've got her."

So he had seen the riding-party; that was why he was so horrid. "You needn't think *she* is so green about men," she cried, impetuously. "Miss Cynthia says what those two girls don't know about men could be written on a grain of sand. *She* thinks you are too slow. Old-fashioned."

He stared stonily, cut to the quick. "You are an impertinent child. Go back to your playthings.

That's your destiny,—to be innocuous. *Scat!*"

He was at the factory door when she called after him, "I'm going to send you some cough-syrup, though." He halted to fling back gloomily, "Better death than this mad world." He was going in the office-door when he suddenly reappeared and hurried to her, holding out the package he had had held tightly tucked under one arm.

"Here," he said, thrusting it between the two books that she carried. "Take this. Don't tell anyone. Keep it as your own soul. I can trust you."

"No, no," she exclaimed. "I can't. Not after what you have done."

He did not hear her. "You are the only one," he said as he backed away out of range. "Old Rex would ask questions. You are true blue," and he was gone, slamming the door of the office behind him.

She stood a moment undecided and then walked slowly on. She could not make a spectacle for any eyes that might be peering from behind the neat blinds on River Street, and so she passed on, perplexed and uneasy, entirely determined to return the package at once. "As soon as he comes back," she told herself.

Meanwhile she must hide it as best she could. She avoided the front hall by making a detour to the music-room and so up the backstairs to her own room, where she dropped it in the bottom of

the lower drawer of her bureau. Mrs. Ellen came along the hall just as she closed the drawer and Sally felt guilty.

"That is right,—put away your things at once," commended Mrs. Ellen. "I make it a rule myself. Did you get those postcards you wanted?" She did not wait for a reply. "Ah, you have the books. They look attractive. Keep them, will you? until I return. I have decided, after all, to go up to Albany for the portrait-sitting this afternoon. I am eager to have it finished. I shall not stop for lunch. You and Miss Cynthia will have it all to yourselves."

She was gone before Sally could speak. What an odd manner she had today! Excited and uncertain. It gave Sally an uncomfortable feeling, as if she had discovered tremors in the portico pillars or seen the grand piano shiver. The serenity of Riverside was shaken and she felt suddenly unhappy and homesick.

Prompted by she knew not what instinct, she took out Philip's parcel and put it in the sewing-bag that Mrs. Ellen had given her. She tucked the bag under her arm and went to seek Miss Cynthia, the warmest heart within reach.

The portico was empty and, from the sounds that filtered out from the music-room, she judged Miss Cynthia had stolen in there to be alone while she tried to revive her memory of the tunes she used to sing in Center Bridge long ago. It would have been unkind to molest her in her uncertain

chirpings. Sally sat down to darn stockings, keeping an eye on the street beyond the ash-tree. After all, it was better to watch for Philip by herself.

He did not appear. Maria called her to lunch and she had still the package in her sewing-bag, which she took to the dining room with her. It weighed on her mind, that package. It made her an accomplice of his. She determined to take it over to the tenant-house before Mrs. Ellen's return. Lunch was a silent affair; both Miss Cynthia and Sally were deeply preoccupied. Sally was floundering in a maze of indecision unusual to her. One moment she had the words on the tip of her tongue and the next she closed her lips; she simply could not make up her mind, either to reveal her suspicions of her kind friend nor to act for herself.

So she let herself drift on the current of circumstance; she would wait some chance impulse that might swing her in a definite direction. When Miss Cynthia disappeared into her room immediately after the meal, she felt a sort of relief. She took her sewing-bag to the river-steps but did not sew. She sat in the warm sunshine with birds winging their busy way about her and the scent of the roses on the light west wind, her head a jumble of finger-prints, secret writing, ghostly visitors, and back of all this, the vision of the Book of the Hours and the treasures of the museum.

"Of course Maria mixed things up by using that stair," she thought, trying to arrange events clearly. "And Philip started that story of the house being haunted by prowling about while it was empty,—before Mrs. Ellen came. He said he was working in the laboratory but I believe now that he was playing tricks, just to give the place a bad name."

She sighed at the loss of her confidence in Philip, but she was sure that her friendship with him was over. His package burned like a coal on her conscience; she was a traitor to be harboring it. She jumped up and went straight to the tenant-house door and knocked. Minerva, in the kitchen, shook her head at the question.

"He's went to Rhinebeck and won't be back the night," she replied. She did not appear interested but bent her rosy face over her ironing-board. As Sally moved away she called after her, "It's the ivory he's after, I guess. He ain't got a smidge of it left. Ya, he's ruint it all and must have more." As Sally halted she added less absently, "He's in a fret without it, for he's workin' day and night now, boilin' and testin' and dryin' and all. *Ach,* a pity to see him, it is so. Sick in heart and sick in body. God knows how it will end."

Back in the house again, Sally was too restless to stay long with a book. She needed action; there was the work of cleaning the book-shelves of the little sitting-room waiting for her, and she flew

to it with zest. But even when she had her implements about her, she did not lose sight of the bag with the burdensome packet. It lay beneath the desk, well hidden from the chance of Maria's advent, and while she worked it was heavy on Sally's mind. Where should she put it tonight?

As she began to work she remembered Mr. Jackson's mention of the other old parchment missal: perhaps it was here among these books. She looked around the room at the loaded shelves. The one under the window had the oldest bindings and she would begin to clean the shelves there, leaving discovery to chance. It made a sort of game of it. The first two shelves yielded nothing earlier than 1800, and law-books at that. The third shelf looked even less promising.

It was very dusty and had to be scrubbed. She went at it with a will, poking the brush into the corners; suddenly a small square section of the back wall swung inward . . . another wall-safe! She craned forward to peer into the dark, shallow space. Tingling with excitement she thrust in her hand.

"Empty!"

She sat back. This must be the place where the Book of Hours had been hidden. Mrs. Ellen had said that Mr. Jackson went alone to get the treasure and that his footsteps, as she happened to hear them, had not gone to the museum, where it should have been.

"Empty," she murmured. "The very place for

Philip's package. No, there's a bit of string. Might as well clean it out."

A hard tug, and the back of the compartment slid aside, showing a smaller space, iron-lined and studded with steel rivet-heads, as if the tiny cell were re-inforced by thick metal walls. A safe hiding-place. She got the package from her sewing-bag and slipped it in, and then fell into panic at the sound of the kitchen-door slamming —Maria had come back from the store and might be here at any moment. She pulled the string with trembling fingers. If it should not work!

It slid smoothly shut, but the outer panel refused to move as she tried hastily to push it into place. Maria was coming up the back-stairs. She gave up and slammed a double-handful of books back onto the shelf: she must cover the opening somehow. The first book dropped on the shelf with a bang, released the hidden spring and the wall was intact again.

Maria stood in the doorway, rolling her eyes.

"Mr. Jackson a'callin'. Miss Simpher say will you please to go talk wif him till she git ready. I'll finish dat job. Tain't no lady-some work, nohow."

Sally waved her off. "No, it's my job, Maria. You're not to lay a finger on it. Go tell Miss Cynthia, I'll be in the drawing-room in two winks."

She thrust the books back, bundled the brushes, pail, and empty sewing-bag into her own room for

the moment, and then ran down in her apron. She put a hand on the portière of the back entrance and stood perfectly still staring. A slim lovely creature stood in the wide doorway. "Miss Cynthia!" she whispered, amazed.

Miss Cynthia was entering the drawing-room from the front hall. Mr. Jackson rose and remained transfixed.

"Miss Cynthia, you surprise me," he exclaimed. "You knock me over. It's you who should be painted this time!"

Miss Cynthia, in an embroidered frock of pale green, looked at him from under the fluff of waving hair that shaded her smooth forehead, and the pretty flush on her cheeks deepened. She turned on him a look that came straight from her heart. "Oh, it would be too great an honor," she breathed.

Sally slipped away, smiling. The old house took on its serene, lovable aspect again, as she bustled about clearing away the work-things, tidying her room, writing a brief note to her mother and then settling down to a book. She read, "Life is the gift of nature, but beautiful living is the gift of wisdom" . . . the sound of the piano and voices stumbling over old tunes gave point to the Greek proverb . . . beautiful living,—that was what Miss Cynthia groped after always and often found. The sweet soft treble and the worn baritone gradually blended in harmony . . . "In the Gloaming," "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still"

. . . beauty and peace flooded out from the music-room into the brooding silence and, rising, crept into the core of Sally's heart.

"All will be well in the end," she told herself and tried to forget the puzzles that had racked her.

Mrs. Ellen at dinner was most gracious. She heard of the visit with smiling interest. "I am glad you did your best in my absence, Cynthia," she said sweetly. "He is a fine man,—a faithful friend. I heard today that he still takes flowers to the grave of Jennie Strawn. Dead twenty years and not forgotten. Yes, indeed, he is like that."

Sally's heart warmed to Mr. Jackson's devotion. "He's just the sort who never forgets," she said, as if she had lived a thousand years.

Miss Cynthia said nothing. It might be she was too old to believe in love.

"Now," said Mrs. Ellen, still with that fictitious gaiety of the morning upon her, "we must have those books, Sally. Bring them to the balcony. You say you are writing letters, Cynthia, and we'll have to excuse you. Let us go at once, Sally. Or wait, I must see to the alarms first. Come with me, if you will."

They made the rounds, setting each alarm with care, though Mrs. Ellen was in such haste to get at the story that she did not test them all. The late twilight had faded, and the frogs were croaking among the rushes and the stars shone brightly

in the dark velvet sky, as they settled themselves on the balcony with the reading-light.

Mrs. Ellen began on the first chapters and then handed the book to Sally. She looked about at the wide stretches of the night-world that lay about them and drew her silk scarf about her shoulders. "Let us go in," she suggested. "The breeze is getting chilly out here," and added with vivacity, "Such a fascinating story. I could listen for hours."

They were well into the mystery of the forged check when Sally was conscious of growing drowsy. She shook off the feeling as best she could and read on. Mrs. Ellen's lids were drooping, and the room was very still.

"Ellen Van Dirk . . . Ellen Van Dirk . . ."

A low, hollow whisper filled the room, sinister, compelling. Sally's heart dropped a beat, and Mrs. Ellen sat up with a jerk, her face white.

"Nellie . . . Nellie . . . I am waiting," the whisper seemed to come from the sitting-room. "Waiting . . ."

Mrs. Ellen half rose and then sank back. "Jeremy. His pet-name. No one else ever did," she stammered.

Sally's blood was pounding in her ears so that she barely heard the next words, which came now from the balcony.

"Nellie . . . I am waiting . . . in the tomb. . . ." There was a hollow groan and then silence.

Habit acted automatically, and Sally's racing heart steadied. She had had better reason than Mrs. Ellen for her courage. Here was more of Philip's treachery. A wave of anger shook her. "It's outrageous," she said and ran to snap on the lights in sitting-room and balcony, while Mrs. Ellen who had sprung to the wall-safe, stood with her back against the ornamental border that hid the spot, a lioness now guarding her treasure. Sally understood that the diamonds were still there.

A sound in the hall made them start. Miss Cynthia in robe and slippers was in the doorway, perplexed and frowning.

"You put on the alarms, didn't you, Cousin Ellen?"

"Certainly. With my own hands," Mrs. Ellen was shrill with strain.

"Well, the laboratory door is wide open," Miss Cynthia announced quietly. "Maria has been in bed an hour. I know that door was tight shut when I went over to her room at nine o'clock to make sure she was in."

Chapter X

THE CORE OF THE MATTER

MISS CYNTHIA, armed with the poker and her new flash-light, led the procession. The balcony and sitting-room were empty of result though she poked into closets and even undid the hook that held the swinging-door of the little den and shook the portière that covered it, much to Mrs. Ellen's annoyance.

"I shall get the locksmith tomorrow to take off those hinges," she declared, nervously. "A swinging-door is absurd. There should be a good lock there."

They explored the hall and blue bedroom and laboratory, while Mrs. Ellen switched on lights and snapped them off again in her agitation, thereby adding much to the confusion of their minds.

Miss Cynthia led them next to the laboratory and from the depths of the closet she poked out a triumphant face. "Here's where the trouble is," she cried, holding up the broken end of an electric wire that was covered with verdigris. "See, it's moulded away, like my front-door bell last year. That's why the alarms didn't work."

Mrs. Ellen scanned the corroded wire and something of her usual composure came back to her. "I knew there was some rational explanation," she said. "I always believe in going right at the core of the matter. I shall have the electricians as soon as I can get them in the morning."

Miss Cynthia flashed a sharp glance down the wide front stairs now fully illumined by a dozen bright lights. "We'll have to go down to see if the locks are all on," she said. "Or, wait, we'll see if the museum is all right."'

Mrs. Ellen allowed her to continue in command: indeed, she seemed quite content to be the last to enter. Sally swept a quick glance at the cases, noting all the treasures in their places; it was not until they were going downstairs that she recalled the empty spot in the corner of the case of least valuable ivories. What was it that belonged there?

She said nothing until they were upstairs again and then she asked, as carelessly as she could, if the iron grille on the museum window were in place. She got a sharp word from poor Mrs. Ellen for giving them a second scare, but she gained her purpose. The card beside the bare spot read, "Fragment of African Tusk—best quality."

In a flash she knew who the disturber of their peace had been. Philip had broken his promise; he had come in again, played the ghost in order to frighten his enemy and made off with the piece of

tusk, which, no doubt he needed for his experiments. She closed her lips. She might tell Miss Cynthia later, but Mrs. Ellen's rebuke had put a barrier between them for the moment. Tomorrow she would surely get the truth from Philip Van Dirk.

Mrs. Ellen came to her room, just as she had shaken out her hair. She turned, brush in hand, expecting some new development.

"How pretty your hair is," Mrs. Ellen exclaimed. "I had no notion it was so thick and wavy. I thought you used crimpers for those little curls of yours. Get your night-things and come over to my room, my dear. I cannot allow you to sleep by yourself tonight. I saw that you were over-wrought . . . that grille in the museum . . . yes, you are nervous. Come along, you will be quite safe and comfortable on my nice soft couch."

Sally could not refuse, though she felt rather uneasy at the prospect. Her doubts were soon dissipated however; for the owner of Riverside, after a brief good night to Sally on the downy couch, sat down at her desk with only the small dim bulb to light her fingers and began to write. It was plain she meant to keep vigil, in spite of Miss Cynthia's assurances that no more trouble was to be expected. Sally had to confess to herself that it was very comfortable on the couch with Mrs. Ellen there at the desk.

"I hope Philip doesn't . . . doesn't . . ." her

thoughts trailed into a chaos of unintelligible words and she slept.

When she waked Mrs. Ellen had vanished, the clock was striking nine and the room was filled with sunshine. She scrambled out, rushed to her room, splashed hastily, dressed in a trice, and ran down with apologies on the tip of her tongue. She heard voices in the dining room but as she passed the open front-door she caught sight of Philip Van Dirk hauling up his canoe. He was no doubt going off somewhere, perhaps for the whole day.

She ran out, waving to him, and he halted, looking rather surprised at her eagerness. He was pale but looked quite cheerful. He hailed her urbanely.

"Great morning, isn't it?"

"You've been in again," she burst out. "You took that piece of tusk, too."

His look hardened. "That bit of ivory was mine," he said coldly. "I had forgotten it. It isn't in Jackson's inventory,—ask him, if you don't believe me."

Baffled, she flung at him, "Frightening women! That's not—"

"One woman," he broke in, harshly. "An interloper and a cad. I promised not to scare the Ethiopian, that was all. I've kept my word about that."

"Well, you've got to take that whispering thing,—whatever it is,—off at once," she de-

clared. "And never put it on again. And you must take back that package. I won't keep it another day."

He thrust his chin out in the way she recognised. "You keep the package till I ask for it, and I'll promise that the ghost of the lamented Jeremy will walk no more. It's a bargain. Shake hands on it."

"I won't shake hands," she demurred. "You are just determined to make me do as you wish. How do I know you will keep your word this time?"

"See here," he said in a friendly tone. "Don't be a little goose. I took my bit of tusk because I needed it,—badly. Besides, I'm not the only one who pledged themselves. You promised to keep that parcel. Ah, I see you're going to be sensible. Good girl, you shall have your reward. Come."

He strode off toward the tenant-house and she followed, in doubt. She was surprised to see that he halted at the ash-tree on his side of the road and, taking out his knife, put his hand in the big crack that ran down the old trunk, gave a few hard strokes to something inside, pulled hard and brought out a severed wire.

"There," he said, showing her the end with its frayed covering and bright copper wire. "There's the last of the ghost of the sainted Jeremy. It's the telephone I rigged up the other night. Two out-lets. One on the balcony roof among the vines

and the other at the window of the den. Pretty smooth, wasn't it? You heard how well it worked."

She was examining the clean-cut wire. "You'd better take it down from the roof," she warned him. "Mrs. Ellen is going to have the electricians here right away."

He inquired and she gave the reason. He was quick to protest. "Don't let her get any strange men in the house," he urged. "I can tell you how to mend that wire. I did the whole job for Grandfather. I'll give you the stuff now."

She had to run to keep up with him, so swift was he now and so eager to forestall the mechanics. He gave her a roll of covered wire, some adhesive tape and minute instructions as to how to clean and mend the break.

"Above all, don't have strange men in the house," he warned her. "You never know what crooks are about. Now, hurry. You may be too late."

Mrs. Ellen's slightly protruding brown eyes looked coldly over the coffee-urn but Sally did not quail. She laid the two little rolls of material on the side-table and sat down in her place.

"Philip Van Dirk told me how to mend the wire," she took the bull by the horns. "He said he had put in the alarms for his grandfather, and that workmen are sometimes thieves in disguise."

"That's true," Miss Cynthia broke in before Mrs. Ellen could speak. "Mrs. Jenks had her

silver oyster-forks that she only uses for company stolen by a chair-mender last winter. I'm so glad, Cousin Ellen, you couldn't get them on the 'phone."

Mrs. Ellen turned the spigot of the urn slowly. "It may be well or it may not be," she returned. "If Sally's actions are as effective as her words appear to have been with you, my dear Cynthia, we shall be saved the trouble and mess of strange mechanics in the house. I shall wait until I am assured."

"It's very simple," Sally murmured. "I'll do my best."

It was simple. A few moments' work with pincers and tape, and the alarm rang as loud as ever. Mrs. Ellen had to agree that it was entirely satisfactory. She seemed just a bit irritated that Philip should have been right about it, for when they were on the portico with the morning paper, she spoke with some eagerness as she pointed to Philip on the landing next door, chatting with the urchin who had been his tormentor.

"I see that wretched young man is reduced to associating with the dregs of the town," she said. "Only the no-accounts appear to enjoy his company now."

"Claire tells me her father thinks highly of Philip," Miss Cynthia's gentle voice was without rancor. "Mr. Duncan knows him pretty well. And Mr. Evans,—and he's president of two banks,—

wants Betty to take him for her husband. He would be welcomed in the best houses, if he chose to go."

Sally's heart warmed to the kindly words. Mrs. Ellen's sniff of scorn fell like a chill on her awakening sympathy for Philip. She seemed destined to be in a perpetual see-saw as to what was justice and what was prejudice. She fell in deep thought, trying to disentangle the two.

"It's the stairway that is at the bottom of it," she thought. "If it weren't there, he wouldn't have come in. It ought to be closed, nailed up forever. Secret things are no good, anyway."

With her, to think was to act. On the first opportunity she got her implements together and went through the laboratory closet, down the dusty stair. She took screws, some pieces of board that she had found in the stable, and set to work. When she had finished, the door was barred securely; no one could enter from outside. She surveyed it with satisfaction.

"Perhaps I ought to have told someone," she thought. "But until I decide who is the best one to tell, that will settle it."

She smiled as she went up the cob-webbed passage. "He'll behave while I've got his package, but if he should try any tricks—"

Meanwhile Philip Van Dirk had been busy in his own work-room, a roughly fitted laboratory in the second-story, directly above his bedroom. He whistled as he moved about among his retorts

and test-tubes and even hummed a bit of song as he bent over a table by the window where some objects were lying in a flood of sunshine. He was already working on the piece of ivory he had recovered from Riverside museum.

"It's coming!" he murmured, rubbing his long, flexible fingers over the surface in a sort of caress. "Gad, what a jolt for old Staffern. He vowed I'd never come within a mile of it."

He hung over the table, unable to tear his eyes from the white and gleaming ivory cylinder, which held all his hopes: he saw in it the whole history of his race, for ivory had dominated his imagination ever since he could remember.

Before him now came the image of the ruddy Colonel in the flush of hearty middle-age, showing him the museum's treasures on the first day he had come to Riverside, a small forlorn boy of ten. He understood it now as a kindly effort to divert his childish grief but it had wakened in him the inherited love for the precious yellow-white carvings. He smiled to remember his grandfather's delight when he had chosen a carved ancient box, instead of a gaily caparisoned elephant of doubtful antiquity. "Dear old Colonel," he muttered.

From that moment they had been friends, chums; riding, walking, talking earnestly of the affairs of the world, like two equals. Philip had been initiated into the mysteries of the laboratory, so far as the tutor could lead him, and

there, in the room where an older Van Dirk had searched for the secret process of preserving the dead, Philip had got the impetus for his quest,—the secret of preserving ivory stainless for all time: there the prying mind of the scientist had begun to develop in him. The tricks of magic, which he had bought from time to time, were an outlet for mere boyish deviltry, and had an added appeal in that he could astonish people and create an impression. He liked, too, to show off at professional performances. "That's a ten dollar trick," he would say. Or if the magic were baffling, "That must have cost 'most a hundred dollars."

"Lunch is ready!"

He started at Minerva's call and went out, locking the door behind him. He took the stair three steps at a time and amazed the staid housekeeper by his exuberant manner.

"Old lady, I am about to ascend the peak of the universe," he cried, shaking out his napkin like a banner. "Next week, next month I shall have laid my hands on the rainbow's end. And that's as true as if your own candid Amandus had spoken it."

"If all was as honest as my 'Mandus, there'd be less trouble fer us wimmin," she flared up. "Truth he always speaks and nothing else. But it's lies, I guess, that most folks want."

He laughed a ringing boyish laugh and shook

his finger at her. "Truth is the resort of blockheads, Minnie," he teased. "Truth—"

But she would not stay to listen to such blasphemy. "You'd best take off that sweater," she flung back over her shoulder. "I'm goin' to wash it before it drops off you from dirt . . ."

She poked her head in again for a last word. "And if you're a-goin' off fer a trip like you said, you'd best put decent shoes on yer feet. Your grandpa wouldn't own you, lookin' like a tramp, as ever was."

"I'm not going on a trip," he retorted. "I'm merely going to call on old Mr. Staffern. I want to get better acquainted with him. Perhaps he might lend me . . . his . . . his silk hat, since you want me to be a real swell."

"Rubbage!" was Minerva's only reply, and the kitchen door shut with a slam.

Chapter XI

THE BOOK OF HOURS ONCE MORE

DAYS passed, peaceful days with summer sun and showers; and Riverside House was steeped in content. Sally went about her daily routine of walks and talks, of reading and studying and playing double solitaire with Miss Cynthia, with a light heart. The wooden bar she had screwed on the door of the secret stair seemed to have shut out all anxieties and problems.

Mrs. Ellen never referred to the ghostly voice and no one could tell what her thoughts were. Whether she accepted it as a whisper from her own sainted Jeremy, or realized that it was some trick of Philip's, Sally could not guess.

The only reference to Philip Van Dirk made by either of the two ladies was Miss Cynthia's confidence, the morning after Mrs. Ellen had spoken so slightingly of him. "I did not want to speak before Cousin Ellen," Miss Cynthia had said. "But Claire told me Mr. Duncan had the utmost confidence in Philip. In fact, he had asked him on several occasions to act for him when Stanley, that wild son of his who disappeared two years ago, got into trouble and was going to be arrested.

Claire, poor thing, told me all about it, for she looks on me as a sort of mother," and the little spinster blushed with emotion. "Everyone here knows about Stanley, but I'd rather you didn't mention it . . . Cousin Ellen is so strict."

Sally's opinion of Philip veered again and she might have revived their former friendly relations if she had been given the chance, but Philip was either away or immersed in laboratory work and she saw little of him. On their few encounters he was full of words. . . . One time he said, "America is preaching the real democracy, with tractors and radios as its prophets. Give a serf a bath-tub and a motor-car and he is the equal of kings." Another time he broke out, before she could speak, "We are rushing into the extravagance that wrecked Rome," and he dilated on modern luxuries till she ran off, laughing. It was not hard to see that he meant to forestall any suggestion of the return of his package. Well, she was in no hurry to give it back to him.

Maria, who got the underground news-service, told her he was working almost all night. "Dey say he's so pestered about dat Minnie gittin' ma'ied to her gemmun friend, which she am a-wukkin' on her truser fer, dat he won't open he mouf to her half de time. Minnie, she don't mind. She jest goes on a'wukkin' on her weddin' close."

"When is she going to get married?" Sally asked.

"Dunno, Miss Sally, ma'am," Maria responded.

"Ef I wuz her, I'd walk right off to de Jestice of de Peas and git my title. A woman needs a title,—ef she kin git it, yassum." And she added mournfully, "My Tip he ain't a-wukkin' now but he's got de promise of a job in de boam-fachury nex' week."

"But you can't marry Tip," Sally told her jokingly. "You promised Mrs. Ellen's husband to take care of her as long as she needs you."

"I dunno," Maria mumbled. "Ef Miss Van Dirk 'ud only take a shine to Tip, he's make a fust-rate gardinger. He mighty fond of flowers. Allus got a flower in he button-hole, yassum. Tip, he'd help ole John fer nothin' fer a spell but dat ole scorpion plumb hates him," and she sighed deeply as she went back to her kitchen. Life was very hard for her at present.

Once Sally on her walks met Amandus Fosbanner, who beamed on her as if he knew no shame, although he must have known that the story of his wavering fancy was town talk. "Pritty day," he said. "You wasn't to the sale, no? *Ach,* you oughta seen it,—goods wuz cheap."

She despised him with the fervor of youthful justice but she could not ignore him entirely, as he was directly in her path: so she said coldly, "I see you bought something."

He grinned with delight. "Ya, you bet. A dandy present fer my girl," he dared to speak so of Minerva! "Wait a minit till I open her up onct. You'll see!" He stripped the burlap bag from the

object he carried and held it up. "Minnie, she busts her self when she gits that!" he declared. "She's a lucky girl to hev sich a good provider, ain't?"

Sally would not agree. "What is it?" she asked.

"A grinder fer bone and *ister*-shells," he demonstrated the machine. "You grinds her,—so, and the chickens gits bone-feed and *ister*-shells like they need, else they don't lay so good. Minnie, she'll be tickled to death, ya!"

Sally went hastily on. This kind of love was outside of her sympathy. Amandus Fosbanner was the most grasping, selfish soul she had ever met. He seemed as satisfied with himself as if he had never planned his despicable interval of marriage with the seamstress. "People are queer," she thought. "Each one thinks they are doing the right thing no matter how they act. I suppose everyone is that way."

She made two exceptions,—her mother and Miss Cynthia. Miss Cynthia was sweet and unselfish all the way through, though for the last week or so she had been rather more remote and preoccupied than before. But, no matter what changes in outward appearances might come to pass, Sally knew Miss Cynthia's purposes would be the best.

"I do hope she isn't worried about money or anything," she thought, remembering the letter she had mailed for the little lady not an hour ago. "She said it was very important and wanted

me to register it and put a special on besides. And she said the lawyer would telegraph the answer."

Lawyers generally meant trouble, as her father's unsigned will had taught her, and she could not get rid of her anxiety. "She's been spending a lot of money lately," she mused, as she went down through Smuggler's Alley to the back-precincts of Riverside. "So many new things."

It was true: ever since the studio-tea Miss Cynthia had been gradually making herself over, from a demure old lady into a modern edition of herself. She was as sweet and gentle as ever but there was an undercurrent of independence that was coming to the surface, a willowy resilience that became more and more evident. She wore the violet dress every afternoon, and her heels were no longer flat. She was revamping her black silk with white satin in a modish style and she used infant-powder on her nose. Unconsciously she spurred Mrs. Ellen on, for the former beautiful Miss Browne was not one to endure eclipse.

Mrs. Van Dirk brought out fine frocks that appeared quite new, though she spoke of them casually as old friends: frocks that out-shone the simpler efforts of her relative as the moon outshines the stars. "I am so weary of that eternal red dress," she would say. "Perhaps it was a mistake to pose in it, for my eyes positively ache from looking at it. I had to get out this green." Or blue or écru . . . as the case might be. She

always had a good reason for what she did.

Sally smiled as she went along under the narrow shadows of the cedars. "Everything is just fine," she thought. "If the family were here it would be perfect."

The family, however, were very well where they were: as Mrs. Shaw emphasized in her letters. Andy was in love with his work, and the garden was flourishing. They had fine, big onions from Sally's patch and the lettuce was wonderful. Aimee, clever Scotch Aimee, had won a prize of ten dollars for the best essay among the high-school juniors on a subject given out by a prominent soap firm,—"Cleanliness as the Basis of Health." Janet was making paper-dolls for the Woman's Exchange,—dolls with marvellous wardrobes for which she got only a few cents more than the cost of production but she was planning to get a wrist-watch for herself with the profits. Mrs. Shaw wrote gaily that she had not had a headache since Andy had gone into Lane and Company.

She halted for a moment to hear the oriole pour out his liquid notes from the branch far up in the ash-tree. "Here we are, sweet Sally. Here we are, sweet Sally," he carolled, over and over in a spray of perfect melody. It was lovely to hear him.

Mr. Jackson was on the portico when she made her way around the house. He had come down to tell Mrs. Ellen that M'sieu Martel had approved

the Book of Hours, though he could not agree upon the value of it until M'sieu Blois, the expert, should arrive. M'sieu Blois would be empowered to pay the sum he considered right and to take the Book back to France with him.

Mrs. Ellen, in a new lace dress, was as gratified as if she had made the Book herself. She appeared to have changed her opinion of it since she had declared it royal nonsense. "There is nothing like that now-a-days," she sighed, settling her diamond bracelet,—she was elaborate for the afternoon according to Olympus standards. "Ah, things are not what they used to be!"

"Don't you believe it," Mr. Jackson lifted his lion-like head and his color rose. "The river of life doesn't change. It flows on. It's our eyes that have changed. When we're young, it is a glorious, rushing flood: when we're old, it seems to slip away among the rocks without a sparkle,—God pity us! Don't blame the river, Mrs. Van Dirk. Don't blame the river."

"Oh," said Mrs. Ellen coldly. "I didn't mean—"

He did not notice her annoyance but rumbled on, "Yes, we blame the times. We say things have changed but the world is the same as when that Phœnician father, ages ago, wrote on his clay tablet to his son, grumbling that times had changed and servants weren't what they used to be. Changed indeed!"

"The Phœnicians lived too long ago to be taken

into account,'' Mrs. Ellen spoke uncertainly; she could not place the Phœnicians at the moment, though later she recalled them clearly.

He flashed a searching look at her and said, with a great laugh, ''Never mind me, Mrs. Ellen. I mount my hobby-horse and ride people down with it but I mean no harm. I am addressing myself oftener than not. By the way, Nardov asked me to give you his apologies,—he is called away for a while and will not be able to paint this week. He hopes you will not be incommoded.''

''Indeed, I am thankful,'' exclaimed Mrs. Ellen with animation. ''The picture is quite satisfactory as it is. I would accept it gladly. In fact, I feel that there is danger, if he works on it more, that he will spoil it. It is a master-piece.''

Mr. Jackson agreed heartily. ''I don't know why he does not consider it finished,'' he said. ''Perhaps because he has taken so short a time to paint it. Yet the old masters could do a portrait at a sitting, if they had to. And there's that portrait of Chase's,—done in an afternoon. A picture isn't like cheese,—it does not have to ripen. A master-piece, as you say. Those diamonds of yours, why, they are dashed in with a brush-stroke that makes them sparkle. I was afraid of them,—diamonds don't paint well as a rule, but he has kept them subdued to the flesh and hair in a way that is marvellous.''

Mrs. Ellen looked as complacent as if this were due to her. ''I can pose at any time, however,''

she said affably. "I have time on my hands,—I'm a lonely woman."

"That reminds me," Mr. Jackson rose. "I have an invitation for Miss Cynthia,—for you all in fact if you care for it,—to see a Singer painting that John Benson has bought. His studio is in the same building. Miss Cynthia likes snow-scenes and she'll admire that peculiar turquoise sky that Singer spent months shut up in an inland valley to study and paint. Any afternoon. Thursday is Benson's day at home. Bless me, I'll miss the boat if I dawdle. Goodbye. Goodbye."

Mrs. Ellen looked after his stalwart figure as he strode away. "I do not like snow-scenes as a rule, but we must go and see this Mr. Singer's work. I understand he is quite an aristocrat. Did you notice, my dear, that Mr. Jackson has at last realized I am not a stranger but a Van Dirk? He called me Mrs. Ellen for the first time."

The telegram for Miss Cynthia arrived late the next day. She came to Sally's room with the yellow paper in her hand.

"My dearest girl, it's all settled now," she cried, as if Sally knew what she was talking about. "I've been bothered,—it was so hard to decide,—but it's all ended. I'm going to have a real good time, the first holiday I've ever allowed myself. Live while you live, as my father used to say. We'll go to the movies and, oh, all sorts of agreeable parties. When I've learned how to—" she

broke off and seemed confused. "After this week we'll have lots of good times."

She came back to tell of meeting Mr. Jackson on her way to the Benson studio that morning. The landscape was beautiful, and,—"do you know, he wasn't ever in love with that Jennie Strawn. He used to give her lessons in drawing, and he only goes to the cemetery once a year because her sister in Kansas asked him to,—you can't trust the cemetery people to keep things tidy if you don't have an eye on them. Don't sit up too late with your books. Next week you'll have a pretty strenuous time," and she laughed happily as she crossed the hall to her own room.

Sally felt a glow that added flavor to the delight of her solitary reading,—an indulgence not known at home. At home she had always been busy, or the girls were with her, or some errand was to be done. Here, with so much leisure, she revelled in books: she read everything that took her fancy,—old philosophies, eighteenth century plays, Greek tragedies. She had unearthed a thumbed set of paper pamphlets, Easy System of French, and tasted the joys of wrestling with a new language. She went about muttering, "*Ou est la plume?*" or "*La femme est morte*" as if these were items of utmost importance. Altogether, she was more content than she had dreamed she could be in Mrs. Ellen's great mansion, and she did not miss,

save at rare intervals, the surge of young life about her.

She laid down her book and went to the window. The crescent moon was setting behind the western hills and the river was decked with hurrying diamonds. Across the water, the warm twinkle of street-lamps looked like a cloud of fire-flies poised over the dark hollow of the river-slope. A pang shot through her at the sheer loveliness of it.

"Oh, if we could only live here, all of us," she thought. "Not in this house, of course, but somewhere near. I shall never love another spot so well." And she tried to excuse herself for this disloyalty to her own country. "It's beautiful but it's more than that,—it has so much behind it. So much has happened here."

Across the moonlight came the people who had made this land their own; Hudson's boat glided past the staring savages who hid among the primeval trees to see the white man pass: trappers, Indians, escaping prisoners both men and women, in their hurrying canoes; Dutch preachers and *schoudts,* luxurious ladies and women with guns in their hands: on they came and passed, making way for yet others until old Joris and Philip the first, and Henry the Egyptian wavered through the moonlight and passed like the rest.

"But I really can't pretend to know what they look like," she told herself. "I only know they

were big, blond men. I wonder where their portraits are."

She wondered about those portraits a good deal but it was Miss Cynthia who put the question. She came back late for lunch one day and as she buttered her roll, said that Claire had told her that there used to be portraits in the hall,—family portraits.

"I loaned them to the Holland Society for a few weeks," Mrs. Ellen's color rose as she spoke. "They were having a reception,—the last of the season and they were very appreciative of my generosity. The pictures are quite safe and will be returned in good time."

"I shall go in to see them," Miss Cynthia declared promptly. "They say that the painting of old Joris is particularly fine. He has some of the ivories on the table beside him, hasn't he? and the copy of the *Côte de Bretagne* in his hand."

"I believe so," said Mrs. Ellen in a tone that disposed of the subject. Nothing more was said at the time but it kindled Sally's interest in the portraits. When she went to Albany again she meant to make an effort to see them.

Mrs. Ellen looked after Miss Cynthia as the other got up rather stiffly and walked slowly out of the dining-room. "I notice dear Cynthia is aging fast, in spite of her efforts after youth," she remarked placidly. "She appears quite rheumatic at times. Last night she had great difficulty

in getting up out of the deep easy-chair. I wanted to help her but feared to wound her feelings. I have always been very supple."

"I thought she must be taking exercises," Sally responded absently. "She's got a Daily Dozen pinned up beside her bed."

She did not tell Mrs. Ellen that she knew how Miss Cynthia felt; for she herself had been a little stiff and sore after her efforts at the oars yesterday. She did not know why she should hesitate to say that she had struck up a friendship with old John and had been reviving her knowledge of rowing. There was nothing wrong about it, but she did not mention it, nevertheless.

Old John had got over his first mistrust of her youth and ignorance, and had taken to her with real good will when he saw that she had a genuine love for growing things. He had shown her his old patched boat which he kept in the small pool that was also the outlet for the water-barrels of the factory, and had allowed her as a great favor to try the oars.

"Dang it, ef you don't make a good fist at it," he had exclaimed. "Ef your muscle holds out, you kin count on seein' somepin of the river-shore. My legs is mortial bad some days and I got jobs all over, from here to creation-end. You kin row me about, ef the Grand Duchess allows ye."

Tomorrow she was to take him to the upper village where he had a job for the day and later on he hinted he would need to go to the lower

river-side for swamp-root for his rheumatics. She did not know, when she looked ahead to these harmless expeditions, what need she would have of her boatmen's craft. The future, fair or dark, bides behind the veil of the present, and keeps its own secrets until it is Today.

Nardov came back in a few days and telephoned for a last sitting. "Mr. Jackson has persuaded me that it is complete," Mrs. Ellen reported him as saying, "but I want to go over it a bit. The frame which we selected is ready and I shall have it here today."

She took Sally with her and promised, after the sitting was over, to show her the Van Dirk portraits at the Holland Society. She was in a most gracious mood, and made the expedition a real pleasure trip. She was sprightly and entertaining and seemed to enjoy every minute. "There is nothing like city life," she said brightly as they made their way up State Street. "The pavements are so easy to walk on, after those soft gravel walks at Riverside. I hope Nardov will not keep us too long. We can take a peep at the shops, if we get through early."

Sally liked the studio in its work-a-day disorder better than in its festal dress. The boxes of paints and pastels, the paint-rags dropped in the empty fire-place, the stacks of fresh canvases against the wall, the clutter of bottles and brushes on the tables all interested her deeply. Her prying mind was fed by these details: it was like

being behind the scenes in the theater: and in the midst of this rather drab disorder the portrait on the big easel under the sky-light glowed like a jewel in a dim setting. Mrs. Ellen's pale face looked out from a gorgeous medley of color, dim greens, suave greys, burning gold, a flare of flat reds with the muted gleam of the famous diamonds: a dominant face, living and compelling. Even the artist in his paint-stained old clothes,—for he wore no smock now,—was less vital than the painted figure on the easel.

Sally watched Nardov plunge his brushes into the colors on his palette and sweep them over the canvas. She could not see the work itself for he had placed her over on the opposite side of the room, but she felt that she was present at the making of a great work of art. If the picture were to be made more glorious than it already was. . . .

"That is all, madame," Nardov said after an hour. "It is finished!"

He stepped back dramatically and flung his paint-rag into the fire-place. "Now we shall see it in its frame."

They were silent as he brought out the massive pale-gold frame and put the canvas in it. Then, "Wonderful," murmured Mrs. Ellen and, "It's not so bad," admitted the painter, while Sally's praise stuck in her throat from sheer lack of suitable words. They were all under the spell of that pale, painted face that looked out from the riot of color.

"By Jove, you've out-done yourself!"

Mr. Jackson's hearty voice made them all start. Tongues were loosed then and Nardov had his fill of praise and Mrs. Ellen, as the subject and center, was for once entirely gratified. Arrangements were discussed for its removal to Riverside later, when the other portraits should be returned to their old places, and Nardov told them that the reporters were to drop in to see it this very day. "You will be quite the most noted lady that Riverside has ever known, madame," he said to his client. "You do not object? You do not forbid a notice in the papers?"

Assuredly not: Mrs. Ellen was willing to sacrifice herself for art to that extent. In fact, she went so far as to hope that the *Olympus Spirit* would not be behind the city papers. "These small-town people need all the art education they can get," she declared.

Sally had noticed that Mr. Jackson's interest in the discussion was perfunctory. The portrait had held him but words about it could not. Once or twice he opened his lips and closed them again but now he interposed.

"May I see you in private for a few minutes, Mrs. Van Dirk?" he asked. "A matter which we discussed in the library at Riverside. As Miss Sally was there, it will be entirely in order to bring her with you. Nardov, my boy, remember we are to lunch together."

He ushered them into his comfortable bachelor

study and when they were seated, he cleared his throat. "I have an unpleasant duty to perform," he began. "You may guess—"

"It's about the Book of Hours," exclaimed Mrs. Ellen, coming out of her rosy cloud of felicity. "I knew nothing good could come of it! A trinket of royalty . . ."

Chapter XII

SUNSHINE AND FAIR WEATHER

"GO on," said Mrs. Ellen with a softer look. "You are surely not to blame—whatever it is."

He glanced at Sally with an absent look and then plunged into his recital, like a swimmer into a chilly pool.

"M'sieu Blois, the Cluny representative, asked me to meet him at M'sieu Martel's rooms yesterday," he said, sitting erect and commanding in his desk-chair. "The Book of Hours is a forgery, a clever imitation, made from an old manuscript book of prayers of a later date. The solder on the jewels of the cover and tool-marks are modern."

"Ah!" Mrs. Ellen's tone was not without a tinge of satisfaction. "As I foresaw. Yes, I knew no good would come of it. But," she added generously, "you did not know it was a forgery."

"No, surely not," he returned rather miserably, "but it reflects on my friend, on the family dear to me for years. It is a reproach on my judgment, too, for not having had the Book examined by experts before submitting it. But it had been so well hid, and for so long. The possibility of its being a replica never entered my head."

"That old French duke fooled Joris Van Dierck," cried Mrs. Ellen with a pounce. "I never trusted those French."

Mr. Jackson sighed, curbing his naturally hasty temper. "That would have been impossible," he explained. "Old Joris was an expert himself and he made sure, after his friend entrusted the Book to him, that the Duc had not been laboring under a delusion about the Book,—as many people do about inherited goods. Loose tradition had no chance with old Joris, I assure you. He had documentary evidence, too, which I forwarded with the Book in all good faith."

"The point is,—who did it? Who made this sham book?" Mrs. Ellen seemed to think she had the whole problem in that question.

He shook his head. "Who knows? It does not matter whether it was one or another, John, or Philip the Egyptian, who to my mind, was the most likely to tamper with it successfully, being a sort of expert himself. The situation will not be improved by that detail. The Cluny has withdrawn from the matter, and the Metropolitan might not care for a dubious copy of even a famous Book like this. As I was the person empowered to dispose of it, I ask you, Mrs. Van Dirk, if you will receive it and put it among the other replicas in the museum."

She did not speak for a space and then she was all dignity, a very impressive person indeed. "What is in the museum will remain there un-

touched, but I will not add another sham to that collection. I have real valuables of my own, and no taste for an imitation article that would always be associated with a humiliating episode. Thank you very much, my dear Mr. Jackson, but —no. I thank you."

He flushed. "Is that final?" he asked quietly.

"Absolutely," with a gracious bend of her head.

"Then I shall give it to Philip, who is after all the rightful owner," he said with some relief, and paused, "But you realize that the jewels are real and the ivory is beautiful and there is a good deal of fine gold. "Let me show it to you again," and he swung about in his chair to reach a lower drawer in the desk.

Mrs. Ellen's lips curved in an indulgent smile as he brought out and unwrapped the Book,—the same gorgeous Book of Hours but seen in another light now. Even to Sally it had a spurious look, dishonored and furtive as a detected forger might have had. Mrs. Ellen did not take a second glance. "Give it to whom you please, Mr. Jackson," she said with finality. "You are free to dispose of it as you will," she said, magnificently.

Something in her manner appeared to ruffle him, or perhaps his own disappointment made him brusque. "You must remember, Mrs. Van Dirk, Philip has behaved generously towards you. He might have contested the will, as indeed I wished him to myself, but he preferred to follow

the wishes, however mistaken, of the man whom he loved. It was only by a narrow margin that he did not inherit the property over the Colonel's head, for as you may know, Old Joris entailed the estate *in perpetuity,* and made an iron-clad provision for the retirement of each possessor in turn at the age of sixty-five in favor of the next in line. The Colonel would have been sixty-five last month."

Mrs. Ellen stared at him. "I never read legal papers," she tried to keep her high, calm dignity. "I leave that to the gentlemen who—" She broke off and took a petulant tone. "Your clerk should have insisted on reading the whole will to me. Or when you came out of the hospital after that automobile accident, you ought to have made it your business to find out whether I understood all this. Sixty-five indeed. What a ridiculous age!"

The lawyer had regained his composure. "You mustn't be too hard on us old fellows," he said smiling down upon her. "You can't understand: you're much too young." He turned to Sally with his nice, deferential air, "And now, Miss Sally, you know almost as much about the famous Van Dirk will as I do."

"And I'll try to be as silent about it as I was about the Book," she smiled back. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me whether Philip—" she stopped but he understood.

"Years hence, when Mrs. Van Dirk reaches the

age-limit set by the founder of the family, Philip must take hold," he said, plainly relieved to get over this announcement as smoothly as possible. "Or—"

"Or if I voluntarily resign in his favor," put in Mrs. Ellen with a gay air. "Oh, I know all that part of it, I assure you. I shall take good care to let you know when either of those dreadful events are to take place. And now we must run away, Mr. Jackson, for we have a lot of foolish things to do this afternoon. I'm going to celebrate the completion of the portrait by taking my Sally-girl to a movie and dear knows what all beside. We're going on a regular spree."

"That's fine," Mr. Jackson shook hands warmly with each. "I wish I were going with you. I'm tied up with Nardov for lunch and I have to go to the stables afterward to see my horse. They say he is a bit lame."

Mrs. Ellen was still smiling as she and Sally made their way down in the elevator. It was not until they were at the restaurant on State Street and luncheon had been ordered that she grew serious for a moment. She looked out over the window-boxes into the wide hilly street where people and motors passed and repassed.

"That canvas was quite dry when I examined it in the frame," she said. "Artists are strange creatures. When he seemed to be painting he was only washing some oil over it and wiping it off.

He couldn't confess right out that I was right about the picture being quite finished two weeks ago."

Sally's lips shaped an "Oh," of astonishment which never found voice.

"And as for that Book of Hours," Mrs. Ellen went rapidly on, growing more heated, "I'd throw it in the river, if I had my way. Fraud and deception,—that's what comes of a family getting mixed up with heathen gods and mummies. I tell you, that house is under the Lord's ban. I shall cleanse it in time. Those idols on the portico must go!"

Sally's eyes stopped her. She glanced at herself in the mirror that was overhung with wisteria-blooms, and grew calm. "Ah, my dear, I can never get used to the wickedness of this world," she sighed, straightening her hat. "As my sainted Jeremy used to say, I am of too fine a clay. But what is the use of talking about it? We must soar above mere earthly matters. . . . I think I'll add broiled mushrooms to my order. They do them very well here."

After they had had their spree, as she had called it, and were back on the portico at Riverside she went back to the absurd time-limit imposed by the will. "Of course; I shall have many years before me as owner of this place," she remarked as she took up her magazine. "Many years, and I shall certainly try to get used to the

country. Philip Van Dirk need have no hope; I shall never abdicate in his favor."

The sunlight filtered through the ancient trees, casting a lovely pattern of light and shade over the old house; the river, symbol of human life flowing ever to the ocean of eternity, plashed softly at the little landing. Sally imagined that the heads of Anubis cocked their eyes sidewise at her in silent mirth—they who had seen so many blind, credulous mortals in the long ages of the world.

Miss Cynthia came in shortly after, and Mrs. Ellen raised her fine eyebrows at the evident effort with which she mounted the steps.

"My dear Cynthia, you must let me give you some liniment," she said compassionately. "You are really almost a cripple."

Miss Cynthia did not want any liniment but the other insisted on going in to hunt it up for her. Miss Cynthia sank down in the chair opposite Sally with a little groan.

"I'll get over it," she muttered. "I've been going too far. Oh, my dear, did you hear that Betty Evans had bought an airplane and teased her father into building a hangar for it out on their grass-lot on the commons? It's lucky Philip Van Dirk and she separated. Such an extravagant piece as she is! Claire tells me that her monthly bills,—monthly, mind you, not yearly,—often amount to two or three thousand dollars. Im-

agine! What ever can she find to spend so much money on? She needs a millionaire, if ever a girl did."

She rose with another groan. "I suppose I'll have to soak myself in that smelly liniment, or hurt Cousin Ellen's feelings," she said, limping slightly. "I hope she doesn't find it. If she does, I shan't be down to dinner. I'll go right to bed and we'll have to do without our good-night chat."

Miss Cynthia did not appear again and the air of the upper hall was gradually saturated with a strong oily medicinal odor that caused Mrs. Ellen to order Maria to close the dining-room door that opened into the hall.

"My olfactory nerves are unusually acute," she remarked as she carved the chicken. "I cannot endure coarse, heavy odors. I will have Maria burn a little sugar upstairs in the front of the house. I should not be able to sleep in such an atmosphere."

"It does smell pretty bad," Sally agreed. "Miss Cynthia must be almost choked."

"It is for her benefit that we are suffering," Mrs. Ellen gently reminded her. "She has brought it on herself. If she would stay home and take three or four days on the flat of her back, she might get entirely well. Though, to tell the truth, I doubt if she would ever be quite as supple as she once was. Age has its great draw-backs, my dear."

Sally watched her cut the wing from the chicken

and lay it on the plate intended for Miss Cynthia. A dab of mashed-potatoes and a small roll were all that she allowed the patient. "You had better take a pitcher of ice-water, Maria," she said benignly. "It will be warm up there, with her door shut."

She sat erect and gracious in the Colonel's carved chair: the great side-board made a background for her spare shoulders and its mirror reflected the thin neck and small knot of white hair on the back of her head. Philip's words about the side-board came back to Sally. Mrs. Van Dirk did not look like a peanut, as he had asserted, but she certainly did not fill the post. The ample side-board, the tall-backed chair seemed to dwarf her, to make her appear almost insignificant.

That night Sally missed the pleasant hour when Miss Cynthia usually came to her room, ostensibly to see that all was well; for the gentle little lady had constituted herself guardian of the back part of the house, and made a nightly round after the house was closed. She and Sally had many long talks by the window, looking out at the stars or the dim river, while both grew drowsy and ready for their beds. Miss Cynthia seemed to know that this hour between waking and sleeping was the most homesick part of the day.

With her lights all on, Sally took stock of the presents that Miss Cynthia had been bringing her almost every day: a pair of silk stockings, a pretty slip, a pink-silk bath-robe and some sachets

and dainty toilet things, all articles that were to be enjoyed in privacy. "Take them, my dear," she had said on each occasion. "They are so little. I'd love to give you everything your heart desires."

Sally had somehow understood that she preferred her not to speak of these gifts to the lady of the mansion. It might make Mrs. Ellen feel as if she, too, should be constantly bestowing gifts, and Sally already felt too much indebted for her weekly wage which was so easily earned, and so she said nothing of them, though she did not hide them. Mrs. Ellen's habit of keeping to her own part of the house had helped to make for privacy. Maria knew, of course; there was little that came into the house that Maria did not lay eyes on, one time or another.

Sally slipped into the bath-robe, the latest gift, and shook out her pale gold hair. The portrait, with its marvellous color, had waked a new sense of color and form in her, and, as she had no other material to experiment on, she took herself for the scheme. She wanted to see if pink, with her white stockings for neck-bands, and her green beads, would make a good arrangement. She looked at the picture in the glass with impartial eyes; she had been so used to thinking always of others that her own image had made slight impression on her.

The small face with its deep grey eyes and pink mouth that looked out from under the heavy fluff

of shining hair was too familiar to be pleasing; she had scrubbed it with the same care as she had given the hand-basin or the tarnished silver at home and with as little interest; for, with Aimee and Janet beside her and her mother's face ever in mind, she felt plain and pale and dim. No one had ever stopped her on the street, as they had the younger girls, to say, "What a pretty little girl," or had they wanted to cuddle and kiss her, as they had the other two. She did not realize that her stiff little back forbade familiarity, even in those early days. She had been so complete, so dignified,—how could they know that she ached for their affectionate praises?

Not that she had resented the lack; no, she had taken it as just and reasonable. If she had been different, they would have showered their attentions on her as they did on the girls. She had gone her way, tiny for her age, very erect, very dignified, as she marshalled tall Aimee and trim Janet from Sunday School to the church-pew, where she had sat with an arm about each, keeping a loving eye on their drowsy heads until they subsided on her shoulders and she could give her attention to the service. If she had known that some of the summer people had nick-named her "The mother-bird," she would have wondered and been mightily pleased, for she loved the girls with a passionate, protecting love.

"No," she said to the image in the glass. "You aren't imposing enough. It takes an important

person, I guess, to make a good picture," and she took off the robe, the beads and bands, and snapped off the light. She was not disappointed, for it had merely been an experiment: an emanation from the brew of fancy. "No," she said again, "but mother or Aimee would be fine."

As she halted at the window for her usual last look before popping into bed, the shadows on the side-lawn danced and moved before her dazzled eyes. The transition from light to darkness had been too abrupt. She rubbed her eyes and the shadows on the moonlit grass paused and steadied. When she closed and opened them again, the same motion wavered down there.

"Oh, dear, I'll have to see what's the matter with them," she thought. "That doctor at school said they'd be all right if I didn't work too hard and I haven't. . . ." She remembered the hours of reading and study. "At least, I haven't used them as much as I did then," she amended. "I guess I'll have to attend to them. Mother said it was very important. I hope it doesn't cost much."

She spoke of the trouble with her eyes when she was alone with Mrs. Ellen the next morning and asked for the address of a optician, for she was not one to hesitate over a decision. Mrs. Ellen was all solicitude. She took her off at once to Dr. Hoorn, the specialist, who turned out to be Mrs. Hoorn's husband and a very high-priced doctor. Mrs. Ellen made no demur over his charges.

"It is well to have the best advice in these

matters," she said, in reply to Sally's earnest thanks. "As you do not have to wear glasses, it is really not so expensive. I should have paid for the whole, of course. I am glad your eyes are perfectly sound. I should have hesitated to let you read to me if they were not."

Sally was more than glad. She used the harmless eye-wash that Dr. Hoorn had prescribed for the slight cold he had found Sally suffering from, and when he cut off her reading for a few days, Sally was thankful to have escaped so lightly.

Miss Cynthia's rheumatism had disappeared, as she had predicted and she grew rosier and fairer, in spite of Mrs. Ellen's gloomy forebodings. She still went to town every afternoon, and sometimes she spent the morning there also. Parcels of all sizes began to arrive at the Post Office and on several occasions Sally had to make more than one trip. Miss Cynthia did not explain these packages but it was as plain as day that she was lavishing money on gowns, shoes, and such articles,—the printed addresses of several of the best stores told that much.

Mrs. Ellen generally ignored them when she saw them but once she remarked rather sharply to Sally as she came in laden with a long pasteboard box, "If Miss Cynthia keeps on buying things, she had better hire that worthless Tip to bring them over. They are too heavy for you."

"I don't mind," Sally said quickly, and added, less certainly, "She said she'd wait till next week

before she let us see them. What is going to happen next week?''

Mrs. Ellen's face lightened. ''My birthday!'' she exclaimed. ''I had no idea dear Cynthia remembered it . . . or even knew it. She must have heard my sainted Jeremy speak of it all those years ago.'' She frowned suddenly, as if recalling something unpleasant. ''Take the box up to her,'' she said sharply. ''I have some writing to do and will not need you this morning.''

Sally was sorry to miss the romance they were reading, but she had plenty to fill in the hour. She put the box in Miss Cynthia's vacant room and turned to go down-stairs, when she remembered that she had left her sewing-bag on the little iron balcony last evening. She went back for it, humming that hymn of Maria's. . . . ''We'll be thar. . . .'' but halted on the threshold of the large chamber, as Mrs. Ellen started up from the desk.

''Oh, I didn't mean to interrupt you,'' exclaimed Sally. ''I left my bag out there last night,'' and she went quickly through the long window, got the bag and returned as swiftly.

As she went out-of-doors Sally thought, ''There, I'm always at it,—interrupting the girls' morning prayers and forgetting to read my Daily Strength. Mrs. Ellen was reading that beautiful hymn-book that Cousin Jeremy gave her so long ago, and perhaps . . . yes, no doubt she was just

going to kiss it for old-time's sake when I blundered in."

At that same moment, Mrs. Ellen raised her bowed head and nodded it once or twice as she regarded the work of her hands,—the careful erasure of some words that had been written below the name on the inside of the cover. "It was stupid of me to forget that Jeremy always dated his gifts," she murmured as she closed the book. "'*To my wife on her fortieth birthday*' is bad enough, without the date. Ah, he was an irritating man at times."

The days were drifting past in a sort of dream for Sally. When she looked back at them, she saw only sunshine, pleasant faces, happy little excursions. The neighbors, most of them sedate elderly ladies, called and talked of the dear Colonel and invited the Riverside ladies to tea or lunch. Sally went to a couple of church suppers with Mrs. Ellen, who was about as much in her element there as a statue of George Washington in a puppet show: but generally they spent their time on the portico or in the drawing-room or in their own rooms, save for the trips to Albany. Sally wrote to her mother, "I can hardly believe that they ever spoke of this place as the haunted house. Everything is so lovely now." She had almost forgotten the barred door at the foot of the secret stair.

The morning the last box arrived Miss Cyn-

thia did not appear at the lunch-table but Mrs. Ellen was not vexed. She greeted her warmly when she came in late in the afternoon, with her hat slipping to one side but a bright light in her eyes.

"I was sorry to miss lunch but I met Mr. Jackson and he took me in to see the portraits. You spoke so highly of them, my dear," she turned to Sally, "that I was eager to see them. Isn't old Joris a wonderful figure? I felt as if his eyes were looking right through me. It was fine of you to lend them, Cousin Ellen."

Mrs. Ellen's eyebrows lifted. "I did not know you were in the habit of meeting my lawyer," she began and then thought better of it, and went on in a softer tone, "They are much appreciated, they tell me."

"Yes," cried Miss Cynthia. "I couldn't tear myself away, and Mr. Jackson told me so much about the family, it was like reading a novel, really! And then he insisted on having lunch, in such a nice café. I thought you might not like my accepting entertainment from a friend of yours but he said he'd had some good dinners at our house in the old days and it was a debt that he was going to pay off. I couldn't refuse that."

Mrs. Ellen's expression became slightly frog-like in its inscrutability. "It is kind of him to remember, I am sure," she said. "I am glad you enjoyed yourself. The pictures will be taken down

tomorrow, I understand, and will be returned to their places."

"Oh," said Miss Cynthia, "Then I could have seen them soon any way. I needn't have gone to the Holland Society."

Sally noticed that she did not seem much crestfallen over the wasted effort but went to her room, to make ready for dinner, with a particularly light, quick tread.

"She's gotten over her rheumatism, hasn't she?" she commented. "She is as light on her feet as Janet herself now. That liniment certainly cured her."

Mrs. Ellen smiled. "I am used to doctoring elderly persons," she explained. "Both of my husbands were careless about drafts and wet feet. I have had experience. But tell me, what was it you said the other day about seeing the Indian exhibit over in Albany?"

"In that white building opposite the State House," Sally answered eagerly. "I'd love to see it, if I might. I could go any time you didn't need me—"

"We'll go tomorrow," said Mrs. Ellen. "I should like to see the Indians myself; being, as I may say, an associate of all heathen peoples through my sainted first husband, your third cousin Jeremy."

She was as good as her word and, as the day was fine and cool, she suggested a drive about the

town afterwards. She knew Sally would like that. Albany held so much of historic interest for the stranger. Sally did like it and she used her eyes to good effect and missed none of the interesting places that their obliging driver pointed out. The State House particularly attracted her and she begged Mrs. Ellen to tell the man to drive around it, so that they could get a clear view of the front with its long flights of wide steps.

Mrs. Ellen explained the building with relish. "That drive at the front, goes under the building," she said, pointing it out. "We can go in and come out on the other s—"

Sally turned quickly to look at her. The hissing sound she was making suggested escaping steam. Mrs. Ellen was staring at two figures emerging from the driveway,—a fine, soldierly man on a big chestnut saddle-horse and a slim straight girl in an up-to-date riding habit mounted on a sorrel pacing mare. They were quite near the taxi, and totally unconscious of it!

"Miss Cynthia!"

Mrs. Ellen hurled out the name as if it stung her lips. She leaned forward to fling it farther.

"Cynthia Dean!"

Chapter XII

GATHERING CLOUDS

THE small, straight smiling girl, who turned out to be Miss Cynthia, rode straight towards them and her flushed face shone with delight.

"Oh, Cousin Ellen, how nice," she cried, drawing rein. "We were going to ride down, and now we don't have to!"

Mrs. Ellen positively glared at her. "Of all immodest costumes—" she began.

Mr. Jackson pulled up his big mount beside her window. "Well, well, this *is* fine!" he exclaimed. "I told Miss Cynthia it was too long a ride for her but she wanted to surprise you. Said she'd promised to explain the mystery of her 'rheumatism.' We were only waiting for Miss Duncan, who had an errand. Upon my soul, Mrs. Van Dirk, you are looking remarkably well."

Claire Duncan clattered up from some unnoted side-street. She was out of breath as she halted by the curb. "My word, I thought I'd missed you," she breathed. "I tried to telephone to Riverside about our going down but they wouldn't answer. Oh, Mrs. Van Dirk how do you do. I

know it is Mrs. Van Dirk, because of your lovely complexion that Miss Cynthia is always talking about."

Sally saw the start that Miss Cynthia gave, but the mistress of Riverside was looking up at Claire and Mr. Jackson with her nicest smile. "It is a great surprise," she agreed, graciously. "I had no idea that Miss Dean was an equestrienne."

"Ah, but she is!" Claire said gaily. "It took time but she's a real sport now. We're going to ride hurdles together next month—"

But that was too much and Miss Cynthia stopped her. "Claire was good enough to want me to ride with her," she said, quietly beaming on the girl and her cousin Ellen. "She loaned me the horse and went with me for the riding-lessons. I have just gotten enough confidence to go out among traffic. It is Claire's kindness that made it all possible."

Mrs. Ellen did not look at her relative by marriage. She smiled up into Mr. Jackson's face. "I think you are quite right about the distance to Olympus being too great," she said, trying to hide her real feelings. "A woman who is no longer as young as she used to be should be careful. Particularly when she is rheumatic. Pray ride on, all of you, and let me see how you manage your horses. My grandfather had a large stable of thoroughbreds and I know a good rider when I see one."

She had got control of the situation. She made

the taxi-driver circle slowly about the State House while the trio trotted their mounts before her. She praised Miss Cynthia's courage, commended Claire for her firm seat, and openly admired Mr. Jackson's appearance on his big chestnut.

"There is nothing so impressive as a fine-looking man on horse-back," she declared.

She wound up by taking them all, just as they were, to tea at the Ten Eyck, where she exerted herself to be agreeable and talked in a sophisticated, entertaining way of Paris, London, and the Riviera. Little Miss Cynthia in her trousers and bowler hat was very silent. Sally was glad when they were in the train again, with Miss Cynthia in skirts and blouse.

"I wish you had let me go and get my dress on before we went to tea," Miss Cynthia said, rather plaintively. "I felt out of place and queer in those riding things."

"Trousers are trousers, wherever they are worn," Mrs. Ellen's voice lost for a moment its light tone. "A *lady's* dress will always be suitable for any occasion."

"I don't know about that," returned the other with sudden spirit. "One's night-gown is suitable for some occasions but even you, Cousin Ellen, would not look well in yours at a church service."

Mrs. Ellen bit her lip and made no reply to this audacity; she turned again to Sally and did not

speak to her cousin again until they were at the portico steps. "I should like to see you, Cynthia, for a few minutes, after you have gone over your letters. Your mail is in your room and I could not help noticing that it is mostly from the stores, bills, I fancy. I shall be waiting for you in the front hall-room."

"Very well," said Miss Cynthia in a low tone. "I shall be there."

Sally wished her flare of spirit had lasted. "She'll let Mrs. Ellen scold her, she's so meek," she thought, not knowing that the meek are the most formidable because they do not flaunt their strength.

Miss Cynthia called her into her room and, to Sally's surprise, she was smiling. There was a great array of boxes on the bed and she was in the act of bringing out another large one. She looked up with sparkling eyes as she tugged at the big box.

"Oh, my dear," she breathed, "you must help me with these things. I didn't mean to bring them out until tomorrow,—Cousin Ellen's birthday,—but I just can't wait. And," she added, sitting back on her heels, "it will please her . . . she's a little up-set, you know. I guess it was stupid of me to keep it all such a secret. People don't like —but take this. It's for you."

Sally was too nonplussed to speak. Here was a very different situation than she had expected. Miss Cynthia laughed like a girl at Sally's beati-

fied expression as she took out a lovely silvery grey silk with embroidered pockets and girdle. "That's not all of it," she cried. "There's more in that box."

Pumps, pale silk stockings, a pretty slip, two sets of lace-trimmed under-things! Sally was absolutely speechless. She dropped on the floor beside Miss Cynthia and squeezed her tight in an ecstatic hug. "It's—it's perfect. . . ." she began.

Miss Cynthia shook her off, and bent to drag out another box from under the bed. "I know your dear mother will like these things, they're so silvery and pretty," she said, still a little breathless from excitement. "I had all your measurements, and I took a shoe . . . oh, it was such fun! Like being a fairy-godmother . . . isn't this a *duck?*"

The hat was the crowning gift,—so smart, so unobtrusively perfect with its simple lines and small ornament. It went to the very core of Sally's heart, for above all other articles that mankind has invented to cover its deficiencies, she loved hats; and she had not had so very much chance to gratify that taste, for there had always been limitations. She put it on and stepped to the pier-glass. For the first time in her life, she really looked at herself with pleasure.

"And I've another for you,—a coral one, and a sport-suit . . . oh, a very simple thing," Miss Cynthia exclaimed, still on her knees, tugging at the second largest box that lay on the bed. "I

wanted you to have two nice outfits . . . you've been so sweet to me,—just like a dear young sister. See . . .'' and she opened the second box.

''Cynthia, what is all this?''

Miss Cynthia dropped the box-lid and Sally whirled about to see Mrs. Ellen in the doorway, erect and amazed. ''Is this the way you squander your money?'' she demanded sharply. ''You must have come into a fortune.''

Miss Cynthia jumped up. ''Oh, no, Cousin Ellen,'' she cried joyfully, not at all dashed. ''Not a fortune but just enough to let me have a real good time. Those bills are all paid—receipted, not duns. Deacon Snow has been wanting to buy my house for years and I've sold it to him. I put half in—''

Mrs. Ellen did not listen to more. ''Do you mean to tell me that you've sold the house over your head to squander in riotous living? In scandalous costumes and useless finery?'' she cried, her color rising and her eyes bright with indignation. ''I am amazed.''

''I've got some lovely things for you,—for your birthday tomorrow,'' Miss Cynthia, undaunted, snatched something from another box and flung its gorgeous shimmering length over the easy-chair that stood between them. ''I knew you liked color . . . Nardov made it for me . . . and the fringe is double length.''

A shawl of melting, swooning colors,—red, blue, violet and green of mystic tones, a work of art. Sally caught her breath at its beauty and even

Mrs. Ellen melted for a moment and took an involuntary step towards it.

"Batik," explained Miss Cynthia. "He said he took special pains to suit your style. Do try it on, Cousin Ellen."

Mrs. Van Dirk, still under the spell, allowed her to put the shawl about her shoulders and tilt the pier-glass towards her. She could not repress an exclamation at the sight of herself. She recovered almost at once, however, and demanded sternly, "And how did you manage to arrange with *my* portrait painter for this—this garment?"

"Oh, that was easy," the other replied brightly. "Mr. Jackson told me when Mr. Nardov would be in the studio and I met him there one day after you had left. I almost ran into you," she smiled. "It was a close shave."

Mrs. Ellen stood like a statue with the shawl about her, and Sally had an unpleasant tightening in her throat.

"You seem to have adopted my lawyer as well as my painter," Mrs. Ellen spoke deliberately. "I did not ask you here to play the great lady like this. I—"

Miss Cynthia's small face was swept with astonishment, wonder and—rage. "You asked me here because you were afraid to stay in a haunted house," she flashed. "You even wanted to pay my fare, if only I'd come, but thank heaven I didn't let you." She broke off, recovered somewhat and went on more quietly, "As for your friend Mr.

Jackson, it is more than probable that I shall never see him again. He has paid off his debt to the past,—and that was only in his own generous fancy,—and that is all there is to it. He happened to meet Miss Duncan and myself today. I have never ridden a mile with him. Set your mind at rest on that point."

Mrs. Ellen looked at her with steely eyes. It was plain she did not entirely believe the statement, and, under her outer calm, those first words rankled.

"A haunted house?" she repeated with disdain. "I expressly told you that I did not take any stock in that nonsense. I was frank about it. It was, as you know, on account of that wretched Maria, who'd got the idea of ghosts into her stupid head and was not to be pacified that I was willing to pay you—"

"That is true," Miss Cynthia broke in. "You wanted to be generous to a degree; it was very good of you, Cousin Ellen."

Sally thought in panic, "She's going to be a door-mat again. She's so meek."

Miss Cynthia hurried on, "But I did not allow you. What's more I have more than made up the six weeks' expenses that I have caused you. I did not mean to speak of it before a third person, but here is the receipt," she opened the bag that always hung on her wrist, and took out a slip of paper. "Your bank's receipt for the sum I put there in your name last week. I meant it for a

birthday surprise. And now," she ended as she thrust the paper into Mrs. Ellen's fingers, "I will ask you both to allow me to change my dress. I shall not be down to dinner."

Mrs. Ellen started. She laid the slip of paper on the desk and dropped the shawl on the chair. Her cheeks were darkly red. "I have no need of your gifts," she said. "Thank God, I have never had to be indebted to anyone. My father left me enough, and my two husbands were men of substance. If I want anything, I can get it. While you,—you have wasted the money that should have been kept for your old age, which is not so far off, and lavished it on finery to show off before my friends," and she stalked out of the room.

Miss Cynthia stood very still for a while. Then she turned to Sally. Her face was pale but there was no anger in it. "I can see how it looks to her, though it would never have occurred to me if she had not put it that way," she said quietly. "After this, it will be difficult for us . . . yes, quite difficult. . . ."

"You had a right to use your own money," Sally murmured. "She got all of hers from someone else,—she didn't make it herself."

"Hush, my dear, you must not take sides in this matter," Miss Cynthia told her gently. "There are always two sides to every question. I have been imprudent. But," there was a firm note in her voice, "I shall not embarrass Cousin Ellen by

staying. Take your pretty things and the shawl, too,—that must go to your mother,—and leave me. It is better so."

She would hear no protest but bundled Sally out of the room with her arms full of gifts, saying in answer to her pleas, "No, my dear, you cannot stay. Cousin Ellen has made unkind references to our friendship. In fact, today on the train she said that if I had associated with persons of my own age, I would not have made such a giddy-head of myself. I shall say good-bye later. Go now. Don't feel bad. It is all right."

Sally shut herself in her room till she should get hold of her self; the outburst had shaken the ground under her feet. She knelt by the window with her head on the cushion of the seat, trying to make herself follow Miss Cynthia's example and see Mrs. Ellen's point of view. She was vaguely conscious of footsteps, the telephone bell and subdued voices, but it was not until there came a heavy bumping sound in the hall, near her door that she started up.

Chapter XIV

THE STAGE IS CLEARED

MISS CYNTHIA'S huge trunk was being carried along the hall to the back-stairs by Tip, aided by Maria. Miss Cynthia in her hat and with a small handbag on the floor beside her stood watching their progress. "Don't bump the plaster," she admonished in her usual voice. "Help him around that corner, Maria, and then come get his money."

Sally went quickly forward, hardly believing her eyes. She was too astonished to speak. Miss Cynthia laid a dollar in Maria's hard palm. "That's for Tip," she said. "And here's the last of your weekly allowance, Maria. You've been very nice about airing my room and all that."

Maria thrust Tip's dollar and her own rustling green notes into her bosom. "Deed, Ise mighty sorry to see de last of you, Miss Simpher," she said with real regret. " 'Tain't only de money you give me so reg'lar ebbery week, hits de nice, ladysome ways you've got. I'm pine blang sorry to see you depart fum this yere house." She put the tip of her tongue in the empty space and took it out to add, "I reckon hit's you what has scared

away de hants. Nary pusson kin call dis yere house outn its name now-a-days. No, ma'am."

"Well, I'm glad you think so, Maria," Miss Cynthia said kindly. "I shall remember that."

She took Sally's hand and drew her inside the door of the pink room, empty now, and spick and span in the long rays of the evening sun. She kissed her warmly, and then took up her bag. "We will say goodbye here, dear girl," she said softly. "Do not feel bad. It was bound to come. It is best to have it over. Goodbye again. I'll write, or 'phone."

Sally heard her quick, light feet on the stairs and her quiet voice saying goodbye to Mrs. Ellen in the lower hall. She ran down in time to catch the last sight of Miss Cynthia's slim form as the screen-door closed on it and to see the astounded face of Mrs. Ellen staring after her with wide protruding eyes. It was plain that the owner of Riverside had been taken by surprise.

"It is too bad that she should behave so," she cried. "I have shown her nothing but kindness, and she goes, smiling and yes, actually patronizing me. Gratitude is a lost virtue, I find. How can she face her Heavenly Father in prayer tonight . . . what is it, Maria? The man with the ice-cream? Very well, I'll be there." As she went out she flung back, almost in a wail, "And I got peach ice-cream for dinner because I knew she liked it!"

Sally went to the portico and stood there a little dazed by the whirl of events. Miss Cynthia,

though kind and reasonable, had not been exactly a door-mat. Sally's lips curved slightly, but she resolutely pressed them together, for it was no laughing matter. Yet she could not help her thoughts, though she did not need to speak them aloud. What she was thinking was, "If Miss Cynthia is meek, I don't wonder the meek will inherit the earth."

When she went in to dinner, the house seemed changed somehow. It had lost some of its brightness. Mrs. Ellen, though she had recovered and spoke and acted in her normal fashion, seemed to have lost something, too. The side-board and the tall carved chair appeared larger and more overpowering in contrast with her slender figure than they ever had. For the first time, the house seemed too large, too masculine to be dominated by the thin personality of its present owner.

Mr. Jackson surprised them by appearing at twilight as they sat silently watching the first stars prick out through the blue. He had to run down to the Evans' place out beyond town on business, he told them and had dropped in on his way back. He hoped they were not too tired. It had been a pleasant day, though. He brought the papers, the *Knickerbocker Press* of Albany and the *Troy Record,* both of which had flattering notices of the portrait. "Nardov's a good advertiser for you, Mrs. Van Dirk," he said with his deep chuckle. "He doesn't hide his light under a bushel. You'll be quite famous hereabouts."

Mrs. Ellen was highly gratified with the notices, which she read closely. "Genius cannot hide itself," she remarked, as she handed the papers to Sally. "I found Mr. Nardov a modest young man. Merit alone can win recognition like this."

Sally caught Mr. Jackson's deep chuckle but all he said was, "I agree with you, Mrs. Van Dirk." She did not know whether there was anything behind the words or not, for she was intent on the papers, and Mrs. Ellen was speaking of Miss Cynthia's sudden departure. Sally's cheeks burned but she kept her unruly tongue between her teeth.

"Indeed I was never so disappointed in any one," Mrs. Ellen's voice actually trembled. "Those quiet people have tempers, I find. I did not try to detain her. I saw it would have been useless."

Mr. Jackson made no comment. "I am sorry she will not be here on Miss Duncan's account," was all he said. "Claire lost her mother too early. But, what's done is done,—my real errand was to borrow a book. The Colonel used to have an old 'Gentleman's Guide to Deportment' in the book-case upstairs. Might I have it for a day or so, to show a book-loving friend? I will return it promptly."

Sally knew just where it was and offered to go for it, but Mrs. Ellen held up her hand. "I laid out a jig-saw puzzle on the table there and

you might disarrange it in passing," she said. "I will get it myself."

When she had disappeared he looked at Sally. "Now tell me how it was," he said.

She was glad to set him right about Miss Cynthia's reasons for her abrupt departure, though she did not, of course, tell him of his share in the matter. He remained quite unruffled, and merely nodded.

"Shams are better torn off in the beginning," he remarked thoughtfully. "It is nothing to grieve over."

She felt a hot wave of resentment at his indifferent attitude and as soon as Mrs. Ellen returned with the book, she said good night rather stiffly and left them. She almost turned up her nose at the cold-heartedness of mankind as she went upstairs, with the sound of their agreeable, conventional voices in her ears. If he had only shown the least scrap of regret!

Then to her mind came the attenuated girlish figure that she had made up for herself,—pale cheeks, large blue eyes, golden curls. . . . Jennie Strawn.

That explained his attitude. He was a man with mourning in his heart. Miss Cynthia, Mrs. Ellen, were to him merely figures on an empty stage. He might as well applaud as not, for his heart lay within the tomb. She recalled then Miss Cynthia's explanation of his visits to the cemetery

but she put them aside. She knew how Andy and the other boys bluffed the girls . . . not any real outright untruth but just a bit of pleasantry. "You've got to jolly them along," Andy himself had said.

Maria's voice interrupted her thoughts. "Please Miss Sally, ma'am, will you back dis yere letter for me? I ain't got a good scribe fer endelopes. 'Pears lak de postman can't make hit out no-how, when I backs de letters my own se'f."

Sally snapped on the light and opened the desk. The address was that of a mail-order house in Philadelphia. Maria was very anxious that it should be correct. "I'm a-sendin' fer a rose-pink brocade dress wif gold trimmin' on de cor-*sage,*" she confided. "Hit's de dressy gals dat mek a shine. Eberybody got new close but me."

Sally laughed, and handed her the envelope. "Better not make yourself too fine," she said. "Tip will expect you to buy him that automobile he's hankering after."

"Deed, Tip he's got wuk now," she protested, as she dropped the letter in her apron pocket. "He's at de boam-fachury." Her face lighted as it did when she had a bit of gossip to deal out. "He say dat yistidy ole Mr. Staffum and Mr. Phil had a big row. Yassum. Mr. Phil he ast Mr. Staffum fer somefin or yuther, and de ole gent he flare right up and fly clean outn hisse'f. Mr. Phil laff and say 'All right' but he look mighty rage-

ful, Tip say. Yassum, dey wuz a big time in de office down dere.''

''I thought Mr. Phil was away,'' Sally said as she rose.

''He wuz, but he come back. He's alus yere or thar, so Minnie say,'' returned Maria as she backed to the door. ''He seem lak he nuvver settle down no more. Reckon he got de heel-sickness what mek him keep de trail, lak de Wanderin' Judas what nuvver stop trabbellin'. Yassum.''

That night was the first that Sally had really felt homesick. She did not sleep well and the grey sky of the morning reflected her mood as she went about her round of tidying her room, getting the mail and dusting the drawing-room. Mrs. Ellen, though kind and chatty, could not fill the void left by little Miss Cynthia.

About two o'clock the front-door bell rang. She was in the hall and she answered it, to save Maria who was in her gingham apron. An impudent young sparrow of a boy in a messenger-cap many sizes too big cocked his head up at her, as he took a stub of pencil from behind his large ear.

''Mrs. Van Dirk?'' he inquired, and added quickly, ''She's at home, fer I seen her. Give her a call, will you? I got a reply wire for her.''

Sally's thoughts flew to the absent one but when Mrs. Ellen bustled down to receive the yellow envelope, it proved to be from Mr. Jackson. Mrs. Ellen wrote the reply and tipped the boy,

smiling as she did so. When the boy had gone she told Sally that she was requested to go to Albany that afternoon on business. "I shall dine at the Ten Eyck and take the seven-thirty back," she said. "Mr. Jackson says it is very important. I cannot imagine what it can be. I shall wear my new white georgette and my green hat. When one dines with a gentleman, one ought not be dowdy, even though it is only a business engagement."

She was about to go upstairs again when she paused, came out on the portico where Sally stood and pointed to a woman coming across the road by the evergreen hedge.

"Gypsies," she said with a frown. "Go tell her that I do not allow vagrants on this property, and if she does not leave immediately I shall telephone the constable." She stood on the portico, watching the woman as she came slowly on. "Tell her they put vagrants to work, in this village. They have an eye on their hen-coops, too."

The woman apparently heard the words, for she halted on the edge of the lawn and waited for Sally to come nearer. She was quite young, very sad and neglected in appearance, and had a low, dispirited voice.

"I heard the lady," she said, shifting the infant she carried from one arm to the other. "I won't vex her by goin' on her grass. I'm movin' on."

"I'm sorry," Sally's sympathy was roused.

"That's a heavy baby for you to carry. Is he yours?"

The young woman nodded and lifted the ruffle of the cap that had slid down over the baby's face. "John Henry's his name. He's ten months old next week. He looks fine when he's washed up."

She held the pretty, dirty face close to Sally as if she wanted her to kiss John Henry, and Sally had not the heart to refuse. She bent forward and touched the downy baby cheek with her lips, and as she did so the mother whispered in her ear, "You're a nice girl, so I tell you. The house 'ull be cracked—yes, I heard 'em plan it. Fatty and Slim. . . ."

"What?" exclaimed Sally, not understanding. She had caught only the first words. "The house is cracked? What do you mean?"

"Sally," called Mrs. Ellen from the porch. "Tell her to go at once, or I shall take action."

The young woman started in alarm and began to walk away, ignoring Sally's questions. She cast an angry look over her shoulder at the lady on the portico. "I'm a-goin'," she called with an angry laugh. "You and your constables! Fat chanct you'd have of findin' me, too! The old gentleman ust to treat us white. That's why I came over today."

Mrs. Ellen, from her heights, tried to get command of the situation by her usual methods.

She drew herself up and spoke with authority. "Stop. . . ." her words died on her lips, for she was addressing the air. The young woman had disappeared behind the evergreens and when Sally went, on Mrs. Ellen's urgent command, to look for her, there was no trace of her to be seen.

"Ah, she understood that I was not to be trifled with," Mrs. Van Dirk glowed with the success of her attack. "I fancy she is cured of wanting to approach respectable homes with her disreputable appeals for money. Fortune-telling is only another form of robbery."

She went to dress for her engagement in better spirits than she had been before and when Maria halted her in the lower hall on her way out, she showed no impatience. "Some tooth-medicine, Maria?" she asked. "I never have need of such a thing. Miss Sally will get you the little hot-water bottle from the medicine-closet in the store-room. That will be the best cure. Go to bed for an hour and keep quite still. You'll be all right when you get up."

Maria received the rubber bag with a disappointed air. "I'm mighty jubous about dis yere hot-water treatment," she muttered under her breath. "Hot-water ain't no *med*-cine. I keeps my hands in dish-water good and plenty but it don't cure my rheumatiz in de j'ints none. No, ma'am, it sure don't." However, she disappeared into her room and remained there for the prescribed hour, and Sally in her own room could hear her groan-

ing enjoyably and sniffing from time to time.

The house was intolerably empty, with the dull day drawing its clouds closer, and Sally went out of doors with her French book. She needed something to occupy her mind. "*Voulez-vous donnez moi la plume?*" she murmured mechanically. "Why do they care so much about pens and books and umbrellas, I wonder? But I suppose one name is as good as another when you're learning a language. . . ."

Maria, peering out of the upper window at her unconscious back breathed more freely. She laid aside the cooling water-bag and took a cautious step towards the laboratory door. Love was calling Maria, and duty's shackles had fallen from her like leaves from an autumn tree. She meant to have an evening at Mandy's, and no questions asked. She might not have her new rose-pink brocade with gold trimming on the cor-*sage* but she'd manage to borrow Mrs. Ellen's new yellow silk. A kind providence had made them nearly of a size, though Maria looked many inches wider of girth, because of lack of art in selecting her clothes.

Down the laboratory stair she sped, stifling her groans, and, with the tools she had fetched with her, made a neat job of it: when she crept up the dusty stair, the wooden bars were under her apron and the moment her foot crossed her kitchen floor, they were in the range, with the lids clapped tight over them. The way to love and freedom

was open for Maria. When night closed in she would be happy.

Fate has a way of balking mortals; even at the very moment that they lift the cup to their lips, she whisks it away from them. Maria's scheme for a happy evening with her friends did not bear the fruit she had hungered for. When she went back to her room, the ache in her jaw was intolerable and her whole face had begun to swell.

She forgot her dreams of outshining that new girl from Hudson who was to be at Mandy's party tonight, and concentrated on her own front tooth. An upper one, that she couldn't afford to lose. "I'd look clean scan'lous wif two teefs out,—top and bottom," she muttered surveying her swollen face in the glass. "Dat yaller gal she got de whitest teef I ever seen. Oh, glory! glory hallelujah, hit's de redhot pinshers in my mouf! I got to go, yassum. I sure got to!"

She wound her face with her old woolen muffler and sought out Sally by the river-steps. "Miss Sally, ma'am, I'se a-swellin' and a-swellin' lak a puff-adder, and I'll sure bust ef I goes on a-swellin'. I'm goin' over to Mandy's and git de Pow-wow woman to wuk on me. Miss Van Dirk she nuvver let me bring her yere no-how. Oh, my lordy! Oh, my soul! I'm passin' out wif de misery in de haid!"

Sally could not stop her, if she had wanted to, for Maria was making off, with the muffler so tight about her head that her ears were of no use

to her. She groaned out, as she reached the privet-hedge, "I'll be back fer breffus, ef I ain't a cole corp. And ef I ain't yere, de Lawd have mussy on my sinful soul. Amen!"

Sally went in and put on all the alarms,—the upper floor first, laboratory, museum, and the two at the front of the house on Mrs. Ellen's room and the closed door of the den. She did not test them, for she knew they were in good working order. Downstairs, she switched on all but the front-door buzzer. "Might as well do it now as later. I might forget and Mrs. Ellen, if she came in after dark, would think I was a poor watchdog," she said.

Then she got herself some supper on a tray and ate it on the portico, with snatches of "The Last of the Vikings" between bites. She enjoyed the sense of freedom that the solitary meal gave her; it was almost as if she were mistress of the great mansion. She waved to old John as he passed with paint-pot and oil-can, going to the nook below the factory to touch up his boat and oil the oar-locks that squeaked so loudly, and he waved back cheerily, for him. Mr. Rex came along and talked for a few minutes. He asked about the Gypsies, what way they had gone and how many there were, for he had learned that two men had been hanging about the factory.

"I was out when they came to the office," he said with a disturbed air. "The boys say they didn't let them into the place, but I've just found

that the old man's mammoth tusk is gone, and I'll be up against it if he finds out, before I can get my hands on them. So you didn't see anyone but a woman with a baby? Well, I'll be moving or Jake Schneider will be at the Lodge."

Sally looked after him as he went briskly up the street in search of Constable Schneider. She was glad Philip Van Dirk was away; after all his jokes about the tusk and his quarrel with Mr. Staffern, it might look just a trifle suspicious for him. She laid down her book and sat listening to the breeze that was weaving back and forth through the trees. Her pleasure was dimmed and she sat thinking of the woman's face and how soft the baby's cheek was. "Cracked" that was what she had said, or perhaps it was some other word,—Gypsy jargon for *haunted* . . . that must be it. She smiled "She was trying to be mysterious," she decided. "They love to make people think they have secret knowledge—"

The telephone was ringing and she ran indoors to the nook behind the music-room and snatched down the receiver. It must be Miss Cynthia. "Yes?" she cried.

"Is that you, Sally?" Mrs. Ellen's unmistakable tones came fitfully, with burring, crackling noises interspersed. "I shall not . . . tell Maria . . . Mr. Jackson. . . "

Sally had to shout before she could make herself heard. "I can't hear! Speak louder!" she urged.

"Dinner post-poned . . . late . . . must stay . . . Maria. . . ."

Dead silence. Sally called again and again but she could not even get the operator. She knew the local telephone-exchange was making repairs that interrupted the service; only this morning the branch 'phone in the upper hall had been out of commission for an hour. She would try later. "She's at the Ten Eyck and I'm bound to get her, if the wire opens in an hour or so," she thought, and went out again to her book.

She tried the telephone at eight o'clock and at nine, both unsuccessful efforts. Twilight was deepening and she did not want to leave the house. The telephone exchange was on the other side of town and would take half an hour or more to get there and back, at best. She looked at the clock and got out a schedule of trains. . . . "She'll be here, if she's coming at all, by ten o'clock," she counted. "I'll keep the house lighted and make it look cheerful for her."

She switched on the side-lights in all the downstairs rooms; and in upper and lower halls; even the three bulbs along the back hall. It looked cheerful, almost festive and took away the lonely feeling that was creeping over her as the evening dragged on. Ten o'clock was a long while in coming. The river had fewer boats, it seemed, than ever before and the tenant-house was dark, save for a glimmer in Minerva's room.

At ten she went to the portico to catch the first

sound of the taxi in which Mrs. Ellen would arrive. She waited there an hour and then went in. The house, all alight, had an empty, stately look, like an unoccupied mansion or a museum. She was restless and uneasy in the silence. Always at home there had been words in the air, footsteps on the floor, laughter or tears; here there was silence, brilliant silence. She was terribly alone.

She went out again but the lowering sky had no comfort for her; if there had been stars she might have shaken off the fear that began to oppress her, but all the heavens were covered with a windy curtain of slow-moving cloud, and her fear grew, became alive and beat on her like a flock of evil birds that beat wild wings upon their chosen prey.

"I won't be scared, I won't," she said, and set her teeth. "I'll go to bed and sleep. Mrs. Ellen won't be home tonight and, even if she does come, she has her key."

She argued herself into a calmer frame of mind. There were plenty of women who lived alone in the town, and there was Minerva next door; her light was still burning low. It was silly to be frightened. Tomorrow morning she'd laugh at her panic. So she went upstairs, tried the 'phone again to make sure it was not working, turned off lights in the front rooms, leaving only the hall lights,—in case Mrs. Ellen came in,—and went to her own room. She did not undress entirely but discarded only her dress and shoes, as she must go down

when she heard the front-door buzzer-alarm, and she took a comfortable out of the closet.

"I'll just take a nap on the couch. I'll wake up more quickly than in my own bed," she thought. "I must be up when Mrs. Ellen comes, or she might go to Maria's room to tell her about breakfast, and then she'd be upset about my being alone here."

As she began the first words . . . "Our Father, who art . . ." her courage came back to her, and she lay down unafraid; the unseen Creator of this changing world seemed near. She counted the chimes of the hall clock. Twelve.

"It will soon be morning," she said. "The moon won't be up till nearly sun-rise, but the nights are so short now. I hope Maria comes in early."

Chapter XV

THE HOUR BEFORE THE STORM

IT was past mid-night. A boat was making its way up the glimmering expanse of water, heading towards the swamp-land. The man in the stern sat huddled, a shapeless, dim mass against the black glitter of the river. The man at the oars pulled hard, his slim form rising and bending with the effect of a tireless, driven machine. Though the boat sped smoothly, eating up the distance in rapid leaps, the man in the stern grumbled under his breath at the slowness of their progress.

"Hadn't oughta took to oars this trip," he muttered. "Hadn't oughta left the motor-boat down yander. We'll be nabbed and then what? Fellers like us hadn't oughta take chances no more. A couple or three more shaves like this 'n, will land us in the jug for keeps."

"Shut up," snarled the slim man over his shoulder. "You sit there and gab . . . for two pins I'd crack your head and chuck you overboard. I ought to have done this last job myself."

"Yeah, and I'd a-fixed your feet fer that," the other growled. "We're pards. Get that. We started pards and we'll end pards, half and half

and divide square. Onct we git on that there steamer, I'll let ye play gentleman all you want, but I'll have an eye peeled, you bet. Atter we land in Rio, you kin go hang fer all of me."

They were silent a space and then the man at the oars spoke in a level tone. "This is my job, Fat, and a big scoop for you. You've got the soft end,—only to take the hootch over to Joe's and come back for me. You—"

"Yeah, I got to butt agin the cops over there," interrupted the other in a sort of whine. "I got a hunch that somepin's goin' to happen."

"Forget it," snapped the oarsman impatient again. "The cops have been sugared till they wouldn't squeak if you took the stuff in under their noses. And I got a hunch, too, and that is, that something's goin' to happen if you don't bring the boat back on time. I'll find you, my buck, wherever you are and I'll see that you don't double-cross anyone in this world again. Remember that."

"All right. All right," mumbled the fat man. "On'y don't you mess up your end on it. We'd a-pulled this trick more'n a month ago if you hadn't run down to Philly fer that flash second-story job that left us cold. . . ."

He grumbled on in his throat, while the other pulled at the oars. "Yeah, your job. Oh sure. You hung around the swell joint up to Albany till you got wise about . . . what? . . . somepin you didn't know how to call the name of . . . yeah,

sure . . . your job . . . how about that old workman what tipped me off about the secret cupboard he built fer the old man when he was a young carpenterin' feller? It's half and half, that's what it is. . . ."

The slender man could endure it no longer. He halted his work and steadied the boat on the outstretched oars. "Let's get this straight, Ryan," he said in a low cold voice. "If you hadn't fat in place of brains, you'd stop howling and pull the trick like a man. I got the dope on the goods,—and whatever they are, it's a fine big haul,—and instead of cracking the bank at Newburg, we chose this for our last scoop before we make our getaway. I searched the house last month and if they'd nabbed me, it would have been me, not you, that was up for life."

"Fat chanct you had of bein' nabbed," Ryan broke in. "Rigged up like that feller next door and all. You knowed the ropes, where the switchboard wuz and all. 'Twuz *pie!*"

The voice of his comrade shook with anger, as he put the oars in motion again. "We'll have this out later,—and, believe me, I'll talk straight,—but shut your jaw now and do your bit. You've gone too far to sneak out of it. When I get to the landing, you beat it to Joe's and if you ain't there in the reeds when I get back, the Lord have mercy on you."

The fat man made no reply, and the words seemed to hang in the heavy air, like living crea-

tures, following and brooding over him. He made a gurgling sound in his throat as the boat swung in beside the swamp-landing, but he uttered no other sound as the first man rose, delivered the oars to him and, stooping to take a large package under his arm, stepped out on the sagging planks. He made a clear silhouette against the sullen sky.

"I'll run this lot into Benetti's and then pull the stunt up there," with a motion of his head to the north. "You'll be here before I will. Wait till I come. If you aren't here, I'll come after you."

The fat man whispered softly and pulled away, his oars dipping soundlessly into the black, moving water as he made his way across the river towards Joe's. When he was out of ear-shot of the man on the landing, he muttered, low in his throat, "Easy fer me . . . oh, sure . . . but I won't take no more of his lip. When I git back. . . ."

. . . . . .

Up in Albany, in a commodious private suite on the first sleeping-floor,—for Mrs. Ellen never trusted herself above the second floor of any building,—the lady of Riverside was sitting before a dressing-table taking the pins out of her silvery hair.

She examined herself critically and with a pleased expression. "Yes, I am quite all those reporters said," she murmured, running a white hand over her firm cheeks. "And that plain georgette I wore was a lucky choice, for it will be in good taste tomorrow morning. It is well I left my

jewels at home. Hotels are risky places. I am sure Mr. Jackson will arrive in time to breakfast with me, as his last telegrams said. Come in," she called affably, as a light tap sounded on the door.

A neat maid entered. "Madame's night things," she said. "Madame did not say whether she desired pyjamas or not but I took the liberty. These are very chic. All my best ladies wear this style."

"Pyjamas!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellen and stopped as she saw the superior expression on the maid's face as she held up the ruffled satin night-garments. "Pyjamas," she repeated in a modified tone, "Oh, yes, they look well enough. You may leave them on the bed, with the other articles. Have you the bill?"

"I thought Madame would prefer to charge them to the desk account here," replied the demure maid. "The ladies usually prefer to do that. Perhaps Madame's husband does not always insist on an itemized bill. It is often so, indeed."

Mrs. Ellen did not rebuke her as she should have done; nor did she inform her that she was a widow twice over, who paid her own bills. She got out her purse and tipped the girl liberally, for she felt young and magnificent. Not for years had she been so thrilled. "Please have them call me at eight," she said. "I expect my—my—that is, I shall breakfast at nine. I want a small table for two reserved for me."

When the maid had gone, she took up the py-

jamas. Pink satin with butterflies embroidered on the coat. They were really very attractive. And modest, surely. Yes, they were comfortable, too. If the hotel got on fire,—and she always expected a conflagration,—she would be at least well covered. She took a few steps before the long mirror of the wardrobe.

"Why; I feel almost like a Chinese dancing girl!" she said. "Trousers are certainly comfortable—"

. . . . . .

Over on the commons below Olympus, Amandus Fosbanner, regardless of the gathering storm, roamed restlessly about, now in his cabin, now out on the rough grass before his door. He sighed from time to time and wiped his forehead, though the night was far from warm. He walked to the spot where Smuggler's Alley made its turn towards Benetti's tumble-down tavern.

"I don' know," he muttered. "It's a big resk. Ya, it's a big venture. I better look out," and he glanced about to make sure he was not overheard. "Mebbe so it'll turn out good. Ef Minnie she wasn't so peticilar about a feller. Ef she goes back on me yet, all them presents will hev to be raffled off onct. Ach, it's hard fer a bachelderman to mek up his mind. It's a big resk. Ya, a big venture. I don' know ef I kin manich it."

. . . . . .

Philip Van Dirk let himself into the tenant-house with his key and stood listening. Not a

sound within the house. "Minnie's gone to bed," he said, half aloud. "I told her not to wait up but the old girl isn't usually so obedient. I'll see if she's left a snack for me, and then I'll hustle up to the lab. I wonder how I'll find things there."

With a sandwich in his hand he tiptoed noiselessly to the top of the house. The laboratory was dark save for the flicker of pale lightning that was beginning to quiver across the southern sky. He snapped on the lights and went to his table, where the short piece of African tusk which he had reclaimed from the museum in Riverside lay on a glass slab directly under the drop-light.

He took it up and examined it closely with his strong microscope. He turned on the day-light flash and scrutinized it again. "It's gone through every test I could think of, and it stays white and hard," he murmured in growing excitement. "If the other," and he glanced at a long object, like a cane, that, half concealed by its coverings, lay in a long bath or trough beside the window-sill, "if the other comes out as well, I'll go right over to old Staffern. The end will have justified me."

He flung back the dark hair from his forehead and looked towards the great house. "You'd forgive me now, Grandfather, if you were here," he breathed, and then started violently. "What's that?"

He paused, listening with all his senses alert. Had there been the sound of a faint tinkling bell

in the distance? Or was it the lid of the glass tray which his absent fingers had been moving about on the glass-topped table? He leaned down and caught an infinitesimal echo of sound that died as he took up the lid. He was a clumsy animal, he told himself. Always thinking of the dear old house, poor fool.

The wind had lulled and the whole dark world seemed to hold its breath, as he stood there beside the open window. Not a sound, not a murmur came to him. The leaves of the ash-trees hung motionless in the light that streamed out from the upper part of his window, as he looked out over the thick blind that screened the lower section. Beyond the unnaturally vivid green of the hedge, like a stage setting in the strong rays of his bulbs, he could see patches of white, among the shadows,—portions of the house-wall pricked out of the gloom by his light.

A surge of homesickness came over him. Memories of the old happy days, that seemed happier and farther away as he looked back at them. He felt suffocated by the small room. How wide and airy were those rooms over there where he had spent most of his life. He pushed the glass tray cover from him and, went out, moved by an overpowering desire for his beloved Riverside, for the library where he had spent so many rainy afternoons as a little lad curled up in the chair that had lured Sally to slumber on the day she first saw Mr. Jackson; for his own pleasant room fitted

up so cozily for his own needs; and most of all for the ivories. That thirst that was in his blood seemed unappeasable; it would not be downed. He saw before him, against the dark wall of night, the carved Roman plaque, the ancient Egyptian ivories, the Chinese gods that had been made before Marco Polo had written in amazement of the vast trade in African tusks that he had seen at Zanzibar.

It was his. It was his by right. It would be his years from now, but that was no consolation at this moment. Those years stretched before him, a dreary length of days. Why had he ever submitted to that woman's presence in the house that should be his. . . .

"I'll not wait," he said desperately. "I'll see Uncle Dick tomorrow. No, I'll wait till I'm ready to show Staffern. Then I'll act. It isn't as if she hadn't money of her own. Grandfather would back me up if he were here. He hated pretentious people like—"

He broke off abruptly. Had he seen a movement at the back of the great house? In the light that still streamed from his laboratory he thought he saw some motion among the bushes by the tool-house.

He ran quickly to the spot but found nothing to lay hands on. Far away there was a mutter of thunder and once again came a pale gleam of flickering light. He saw in that faint flash that the arbor that screened the door of the secret stair

was broken as if someone had rushed out of that door in mad haste, not caring how they went.

The package he had given Sally! Someone had got wind of it and been here for it. His brain whirled for a second . . . perhaps they had been frightened off . . . perhaps they had torn the arbor getting in,—for that arbor was within only a few inches of the door. . . .

He sprang through the opening and put out his fingers to find the sunken handle. The door yielded to his first touch and swung inward noiselessly. It had been left open.

Chapter XVI

THE STORM BREAKS

SALLY woke with a start. She had been dreaming that Aimee and Janet were washing the carved Venetian goblets in the museum and Janet had flung the tall ruby one with the gold tracery on it at old John who would poke at the case of ivories with the greasy oar he carried like a cane.

She sat up, with the sound of tinkling glass in her ears. Or was it a buzzing bell? The front-door alarm, that was it. Mrs. Ellen had come home and set it off with her key. She jumped out of bed and opened her door. Yes, there was a light streaming from Mrs. Ellen's bedroom. She must have got upstairs very quickly.

"Oh, you're there," she cried as she sped along the hall. "I thought you'd—"

She halted on the threshold, for the room was empty. The door of the wall-safe stood slightly ajar and there was a sound of someone moving the books in the little sitting-room. Her heart gave a leap and died within her; she stood petrified. Mrs. Ellen must have got word, in some mysterious way, of her pact with Philip. She opened

her lips to finish the sentence, when the spring door of the den slammed and a man sprang across the hall-room.

"Philip!" she called.

He fled like a shadow down the back-hall and as he turned the angle she saw that he wore a black cloth about the upper part of his face and that, clutched in one hand, he had the chamois-bag that held Mrs. Ellen's diamonds.

"Stop!" she screamed and ran after him.

The laboratory door swung shut in her face but she flung herself against it with all her strength, so that as it suddenly yielded she staggered into the darkened room and had to catch at the long table to steady herself. Before she could regain her footing, she heard the man run down the secret stair. She flew after him, not thinking of the danger but only intent on getting the chamois bag. The wooden bars she had screwed on the door would hold him for a moment or two at least, for they were stout and strong.

At the head of the stairs she bumped into him, coming back. She caught his sleeve and pulled him into the laboratory. It did not seem strange to her that he should come willingly. The lights went on without any motion on her part, and there was Philip Van Dirk, pale, breathless, with an iron clutch on her wrist.

"Who was it? Did he get the package?" he shook the words out with an effort at calmness. "Tell me. Tell me."

She stared at him. "It wasn't you?" she asked, amazed.

They both woke to action at the same instant. Philip rushed to the stairway. "Call the police . . . no . . . see what damage is done. Did they get the—" he halted suddenly and turned.

"The diamonds. Mrs. Ellen's diamonds," she cried. "I don't know about your package. It was in the den. . . . I'll get the constable. . . ."

He was ahead of her, brushing her aside, as he ran to the swinging door and pushed it open. "Get the constable," he flung back at her. "Tell him about the diamonds. Not the package. I'll wait till after I see what's happened."

He was out again before she could ring twice and had disappeared, running towards the laboratory. "I'll take my canoe," he called back. "It'll be quicker. If he goes to Benetti's I can get there in half the time. If he makes for the river, I'll cut him off."

Sally laid down the receiver. In her mad agitation she had forgotten that the line was out of order and would not be of any use tonight. What should she do? Into the whirl of her mind came the package,—had Philip found the strong-box in the bookshelves empty? She went in by way of the front room, closing the wall-safe as she passed. The books were scattered about the floor of the small room and she stooped to peer in at the cleared space on the third shelf. The wall-space was intact and she groped for the secret

spring. She found it and the outer panel opened; she snatched the string and as the inner panel slid aside, she saw that the compartment was empty.

"Philip couldn't have known it," she breathed. "He didn't take time. Oh, what shall I do? For I must tell him. He must know."

She flung the books into place without knowing that she did so, and, catching up Mrs. Ellen's violet sweater from the table where that lady had laid it, she slipped into it as she ran downstairs. It was long and warm but she was not conscious of her body: she did not even know that she had no shoes on her feet. In the tremendous excitement that possessed her, she was only aware that she must find Philip.

Old John's boat was in its place among the blighted grasses of the factory-yard. The sullen oily water reflected the broken gloom of the cloud-swept sky. She had a feeling of repulsion at the slimy sedge-grass that caught at the oar as she pushed off, as if some evil thing had reached out to balk her. Once she was free of the pool, the whirling in her brain steadied and an intense consciousness of everything that was happening took its place. She felt the smooth action of the oars in the freshly-greased oar-locks saw the dark outlines of Riverside with the dim splashes of lighted windows ripple before the boat's prow; heard, far down the river, the whistle of a steamer going south.

She pulled with all her might, and saw the dim mass of stables and out-buildings glide by, followed by the silhouettes of cottages and shacks, and then the open spaces where there was no landmark in this gloom. One moment she seemed to fly ahead at great speed, and the next to remain fixed as in a dream.

A gust shook the reeds as she made into the ruined landing-place, and she guided the clumsy boat into the channel beside the planking under cover of their rustling murmur. The place was empty. No. There was the canoe, jammed in the mud by the landing so close beside her boat that it was a marvel she had not grazed it. A flare of lightning showed her that it was half-filled with water.

She shook off the terror that tried to lay hold on her. "He must have brought it here and left it," she thought, swiftly. "He must have run into the wharf and smashed it. He was rushing so."

She manipulated her boat into the space beyond the broken canoe, where she would be doubly safe. The tall reeds were denser here and the plank-walk of the landing was just above her. She might stand up and pull herself out on the wooden level. As she silently made the oars fast, before she should make the attempt to raise herself to the plank-walk a picture of that hot, sunny June day when she had squatted in the onion-

bed, with Janet's shrill treble in her ears, floated before her and was gone. She halted, with a hand on the planking, as if she had actually heard that call. . . . "Sally, Sally!"

In the fraction of a second that she paused. she became aware of a new sound on the air. Running feet. Someone was fleeing down the swamp-path. The planking shook under a light, swift tread, the outline of a man showed up there beyond the tops of the reeds and a foot stumbled against her hand.

"Ah, you're there? Speak!"

The low whisper was intense, terrible with an unvoiced threat.

"Are you there?"

Sally's dry throat failed her. Who did that man up there expect to find down here among the reeds? Another thief, like himself? How would that other one answer him? "Sure," she whispered, from her screen of rushes.

"Catch hold then," the man bent so low she could hear his hurrying breath hiss in his throat, and something dropped into the boat. It fell on her foot,—something soft and heavy. "Have you got it?"

"Sure," she shot back.

"They're after me," the man breathed. "Lay low. I fooled them on the lower trail. I'm off to Benetti's. He stalled on the price of the stuff but I'll have it, if I have to choke the wind out of

him. When you hear me, be ready to pull off. We'll make a clean getaway, if you don't lose your nerve. Do you hear?"

"Sure," she hissed, for the third time.

His feet padded swiftly away into the darkness and as she stooped to grope for the object that had fallen upon her foot, there came the flare of lightning again and she saw the bottom of the boat, her own feet and the chamois-bag, all in one brief shimmer of light.

"The diamonds," she gasped and sank on the seat, with the bulky bag against her heart. A miracle, a real miracle had been worked, and her frantic quest was ended. She must put out at once, before the other man, for whom she had been so mercifully mistaken, should arrive. Philip would be far away searching the lower swamp-lands and she dared not risk delay. She took up an oar to push out and halted in panic, as she caught again the sound of feet running on the wharf.

The thunder rolled sullenly down in the south and in the white flash that followed she saw Philip above her on the planking.

"Philip," she called in a low tone. "It's me,—Sally."

He stooped and peered.

"I'm in John's boat and I've got the diamonds," she flashed. "Come, get in, quick. We must get off. Hurry. Hurry."

He did not speak but swung himself into the

boat beside her, as noiseless as a cat. "Give me the oars," he whispered. "I smashed my canoe. Lucky you came. I chased the fellow into the marsh. He won't—"

The sound of a boat making in towards the landing came distinctly in the brief drop of the wind. A man was rowing towards them, and his panting breaths were those of a man in haste and fear. Philip held the oar motionless and Sally crouched down until the reeds blotted out even the cloud-blurred sky.

Ages seemed to pass, before the boat drew in beside them, so close that they felt the reeds press upon them as they bent before the push of the other boat. Sally feared the newcomer must hear the mad beating of her heart, as she cowered in the darkness. If the lightning should reveal them. . . .

The man, fortunately, was occupied with his own affairs. His panting breath did not diminish when he ceased his heavy pulling at the oars; instead it increased as the boat came to rest. He was in the grip of some strong emotion, and kept muttering to himself. "Ain't here," Sally caught among the rumble. "If he's done me, the four-flusher—" and then he gave a low, melodious whistle, like the call of a night-bird.

Once again light footsteps sounded on the wooden surface above, and a fierce whisper shot towards the boat. "Don't rouse the whole shooting-match," hissed the same voice as had whis-

pered to Sally. "I didn't tell you to tip the signal. Push out where I can drop in easy. I got Benetti's cash."

At the sound of the voice, she felt Philip start, but he did not change his position; only his breathing became more hurried.

The boat pushed out a little and made a half-circle to the end of the wharf. The oarsman's panting quickened as he whispered, "Got the swag? Joe wouldn't cough up on'y half the dough, but I couldn't kick. The bulls was thick as hops about the place."

The slim man halted with one foot poised. "What are you trying to pull off on me? I gave you the sparklers when I was here a minute ago. Don't try that dodge."

The man in the boat made a strange sound, like the whine of a frightened animal. "I knowed it," he cried in a muffled voice. "I knowed you'd do me dirt. You're tryin' to frame me. I never seen nothin'. I wasn't here—"

The words ended in a wheeze, as the other dragged him out on the landing-stage, with an oath. "Give me that bag, or I'll tear the heart out of you," he commanded, fiercely.

The fat man choked and spluttered. "Leggo, or I'll holler."

"You will, will you? Now scream, if you can."

There was a gurgling sound as of someone choked, a snarl like an angry panther, as the fat man wrenched himself free from the clutching

fingers and struck a stunning blow. The slim man staggered backward and almost fell into the hidden boat: only Philip's hand over her lips kept Sally from crying out. The man, dim against the sky, recovered, lunged forward and the two clinched in silence.

Panting softly, they fought together there, while the old planks creaked and swayed. Sally, with the diamonds clutched to her breast, sat rigid, sickened. Once she got a glancing blow on the shoulder from a foot that slipped on the edge of the rotten wood; once she felt a spurt of something warm upon her cheek; once she felt the piling sway against their boat-side, as if it were toppling over: but she sat there, with the sound of blows on flesh and broken imprecations, shut in by the black night.

Suddenly there was a thud. A body had fallen on the landing-stage. The voice of the slim man came in a snarl, "I'll teach you—"

A shrill whistle far down the river cut his words like a knife. There was a sound of dragging feet, as if he moved towards the boat still at the wharf-end, and then he seemed to be back at the fallen man's side again. He must be searching him for the gems. A sudden low cry, and he started up, blundering backward into the post by the old willow at the edge of the pier. The whistle sounded again, nearer this time; he dropped into the boat and pushed off.

He passed close beside them, muttering, "Not

on him, unless he's dropped them. Must be in the boat here," and then he was gone, swallowed up in the night, leaving only the faint gurgle of back-wash against their boat-side to show in what haste he fled. He was scurrying away, putting out his utmost strength to gain the motor-boat hidden in the swamp-lands to the southward.

Philip leaned close to Sally's ear. "I'll take you home, and then come back. That fellow there may be badly hurt. Sit still and keep quiet. I can't have you mixed up in this."

He worked out cautiously, edging through the reeds. Philip rowed with all his strength and the boat shot away, hidden by the drooping willow tree.

When they had gained the point below the village he took a long breath, and glanced back over his shoulder as he turned the boat's nose in towards the shore. "A close shave," he murmured. "That fellow may have seen us. I'll land you here. You've got the diamonds? Good. Get out quickly. That step will bear you, all right. I'll be back. I've got to find out. I *must* find out."

Even in the turmoil of her mind, she felt the terrible excitement behind his words, as she felt the sweep of the rising wind and heard the growl of the thunder. She scrambled over the causeway and started to run along the river-bank. The storm was now directly over-head, although no rain had fallen as yet. With the chamois-bag held tightly against the breast of Mrs. Ellen's sweater,

she stumbled blindly on past the cottages, past the stables and up the portico steps. The hollow rumble of thunder shook the earth and white, blinding daggers of light stabbed the heavens, snatching out a dazzling, unreal world from the black void for one vivid second and then gone, leaving utter emptiness. The rain came down in sheets as she gained the front door and all the house was alive with its drumming.

She looked about her. Everything was just as usual. The lights burned cheerfully in the empty rooms and halls, and the French book that she had laid down on the hall-table when she came indoors this afternoon lay open at the lesson.

She stood in the middle of the lower hall and tried to think. What was it Philip had told her to do? Warn the police, that was it. Send word down the river to the State Police. She went to the telephone in the nook back of the music-room and took down the receiver before she remembered again that the wire was useless.

"I must get my shoes on and go over to the hotel," she thought. "That's nearer than the 'phone-exchange. The wires may all be out of commission now. This storm—"

She managed to get into her shoes and down to the hall again. Waves of faintness that came over her made it difficult to see where she was going. She had the chamois-bag secured with two big safety-pins inside her blouse and it hurt her as she swayed against the door. She sank into a chair

to wait till the giddiness had passed. Her head fell against the high carved chair-back and the objects in the hall whirled and dimmed.

Far away, lost in some fog of time, footsteps were coming,—nearer, and nearer. She tried to rise, to open her eyes but could not.

Chapter XVII

THE MORNING AFTER

SHE sat up, swaying, and looked about her. The serene house was exactly as before, except that long, pale rays of moonlight lay in horizontal bands across the well-space between the two flights of stairs. "The moon," she thought, stupidly. "It must be—"

The hall-clock broke in as if to prompt her lagging brain. One. Two. Three.

She roused herself, holding to the chair-arms. Through the front-door and the eastern windows a faint, pinkish glow began to grow, and she became conscious of a great twittering and calling of bird-voices. Her thoughts could not settle on anything clearly. "The wires are cut," she told herself, and clung to that for a while, repeating it as if it were a magic formula that would still the tumult within her.

She did not know whether she fainted or slept for another period; but she lost consciousness of time. When she came back to herself, she was still in the chair and the sun was sending its warm light into the room. The sound of footsteps was still in her ears: every time she closed her eyes

she heard them, light running footsteps, coming nearer. She realized now that they were echoes of that dark hour last night, when she had waited hidden in the reeds with Philip's quick hand on her lips.

She got up and walked unsteadily for a few steps, and then her nerves and mind steadied. She was herself again. "Mrs. Ellen didn't come back," she said, with a hand on the chamois-bag. "I was going to telephone. I must go. Though Philip ought to have sent in that call long ago. It's queer he did not come back."

The fear that some misadventure had befallen him quickened her feet. The front-door key was up in Albany with its owner; Maria had the key to the back entrance: the music-room was her only exit. She took the path along the privet-hedge and slipped out through the gap in the evergreen wall by the big ash-tree. Maria, who was coming down the side road, gave a low howl at the sight of her.

"My laws, chile, you'se done murdered, dat's what you is," she cried. "Blood on de face and blood on de buzzum! Whar's you hurt, lil'le gal?"

Sally stepped back from the sympathetic fingers. "I'm not hurt at all. What do you mean by blood—" her fingers came in contact with a dried spot on her cheek that crackled as she rubbed it. "Oh, that!" she said. "But you've got blood on your handkerchief. Were you—"

"I done los' anuvver toof," Maria broke in.

"Dat Pow-wow woman wasn't no good. Perfessor Johnsing's jest made de operashum."

Sally could not stay. "Operation?" she echoed, as she moved on. "This early in the morning?"

"Perfessor Johnsing am a Tonsorial Artist by perfesshum, and he does his scientifical wuk befo' and atter his daily vocashums," Maria responded quickly. "Oh, Miss Sally, ma'am, don't you go ober to dat ole Mr. Coughming's house. Dey's chasin' folks away fum dere. De State cops am gwine to—"

Sally wheeled about. "Mr. Cauffman—the Justice of the Peace—do you mean his house?" she shot out. "Then they've got him?"

"Yassum, Miss Sally. Dey got him, sure 'nuff. I seen him dere, a-lookin' outn de winder. Pale as def, wif he hair all rompled-like on he haid. And, Miss Sally, ma'am, he's got de mark o' Cain on he forehead. Yassum."

"What does he look like?" Sally paused long enough to ask. Philip had been able to warn the police, after all. "Is he tall and slim?"

Maria stared at her, incredulous. "My laws, chile, ain't you heerd about it? Hit's Mr. Phil himse'f."

"Philip!" cried Sally. "Oh, it can't be. It's a mistake! How did it happen?"

She was crying out against the arrest, but Maria misunderstood. "Dat's what on'y de angels knows, Miss Sally," she replied impressively. "Dey say he must hev slew de man on de wharf

and drapped him in de boat he stole fum ole John, fer de boat was brim full of blood. Yassum. When de police come on him atter de slewin', he wuz—''

''But he sent word to the police,'' Sally burst out.

''Him? No, ma'am. Hit wuz dat Amandy Forsebander. He 'phoamed jest as he wuz leavin' town wif Minnie Paltz to git married down to Newburg. He say he hear a fight down to de landin' and mebbe some dark deed happen dere. And when de police git dar, dey find Mr. Philip Fan Dirt a-triflin' wif de corpse. He say he on'y come to see ef anyone wuz hurt, but he wouldn't tell how he know dere *wuz* trouble at dat spot. Yassum. He don't say no word,—on'y ast please fer to send fer Mr. Jacksum from Albany, quick.''

Sally was thunder-struck. How well this chain of circumstantial evidence had been linked! She must rush away to shatter it, but first she must learn absolutely how much was truth and how much was due to Maria's inflammable imagination.

'' 'Deed, hit's de gospel truf,'' Maria protested. ''De corpse am a-restin' in Mr. Beemish's shop,—him bein' Corn'er and undertaker seem reel providentious-like. I cain't say edzactly how he's favored, but dey say he's a stoutish gemmun.'' She did not add that she, with other interested citizens, had been shoved away from the Coroner's door by the State Policeman guarding

the place. "He's got he head broke, dey say. Mr. Philip got a powerful hand, pore gemmun. Miss Van Dirk allus say he ain't no good but I reckon she won't injiy seein' him a-settin' in dat eleptric chair. . . ."

Sally heard no more. She ran on, her blood boiling at the fickleness of Maria. Yesterday she had been full of praise for the young man she was eager to condemn today. It was Sally's first encounter with the weather-cock, Public Opinion.

At the corner of State Road she was almost knocked down by a small automobile, that came chugging around from the highway. Its brakes ground and the driver shouted. It was Amandus Fosbanner, with Minerva's pink face smiling beside him. She made an imperious gesture and the car halted. Amandus' red face peered out.

"I ast pardon fer speedin', but—" he began.

She was on the running-board. 'Take me over to Mr. Cauffman's house, quick," she commanded. "You telephoned the police, didn't you? There's a mistake. They've arrested Mr. Philip for murder."

Amandus stared.

"There was a fight," Sally flung at him. "A man dead. He went to see and they found him there. Take me. Quick!"

Amandus' great fists shot up in the air. "*Dumkopfs!*" he shouted, and shot the gear into high without warning.

Sally managed to cling to the door and finally

to tumble into the back seat as they sped up the back street to the substantial dwelling of the Justice of the Peace, with Amandus uttering deep growls of disgust and Minerva's plump shoulders shaking with suppressed sobs. They slowed as suddenly as they had started and Amandus was out on the pavement with amazing swiftness.

He rushed to the door where old Jake Schneider was standing at ease, the crowd having been dispersed and sent home. Amandus raged at him and brandished huge red fists and bellowed at the top of his lungs.

"You let heem go, I tell you. He ain't de feller. I know. I kin tell. Jest let me tell. I know. . . ."

It took both Mr. Cauffman and old Schneider to get him into a chair in the corner of the sitting-room where the Justice had his desk. They were so taken up with him that they paid no attention to Sally and Minerva, who followed in the background.

"Sure I know what I see out of mine own eyes," Amandus vociferated. "I got my senses, ain't? I don't go crazy yet. You listen now. . . ."

Mr. Cauffman insisted on swearing him in and Amandus fretted at the slight delay. "Sure I tell the truth. I allus tell the truth. Now, let me git on. Don't never mind about a pen, Jake, it's what you two hears,—not what's wrote down on paper. Now," he paused and pointed a stubby finger at the Justice who blinked wisely. "I wuz walkin' out last night, thinkin' of mekkin' myself

into a merried man,—me and Minnie bein' due to git spliced over to Newburg and Minnie bein' late to show up at the cabin,—well, as I says, I wuz wonderin' ef she'd got lost and mebbe it wuz all off."

"And I wuz a-waitin' all the while at the livery-stable, and him all mixed up about it," interposed Minerva in a flurry. "I thought it wuz too late fer a wedding already."

"Late, ya, but we maniched it," Amandus went on. "We got the parson out of his bed yet and give him an extry dollar. Ya, it cost expensive but—"

"See here, is this evidence in a murder case or a private bit of news?" Mr. Cauffman interrupted him. "Stick to facts bearing on the case, Fosbanner."

"Yes, I should think so," muttered Old Schneider, scratching his nose with his heavy Masonic signet-ring. "Can't write all that stuff down. It 'ud take a writin'-machine to git it all. Make it snappy, Mandus."

"Evidence? Ya, evidence it is," Amandus was angry again. "Else why wuz I out fer de air? Weddin's don't come every day. I goes out to git de air. I hears a feller runnin' clost by me. He never even see me. I thinks, 'On'y a feller in trouble is deef like dat,' And I listens. He goes down de road to de old wharf. But he comes back agin. Runnin' to Benetti's. I thinks dose Benetti folks is a bad gang and I keep out. I looks about

fer Minnie on de road to town and she ain't dere. Women is sich dwadlers—"

"Stick to your testimony," Mr. Cauffman's tone was sharp. "We'll never get at it if this keeps on."

Amandus eyed him sullenly but continued. "When I comes back to de place where I seen him, I hears a fight goin' on down dere, and I says to myself, 'Dis is de time you go call de *po*-lice. You don't want no rumpus about here, and a lady comin' to git married onct, so I goes to de garage, 'cause it's open all night and I gits de number and tells de State *Po*-lice about de rumpus, and Minnie comes and we go to Newburg and calls de Lutheran minister up—"

"Would you recognize the man who ran past you?" asked the Justice. Old Schneider held his pen suspended over the note-book and stared at Amandus. Sally clenched her hands; would he never get to the point?

"Ya, sure, I'd know heem. The lightenin' showed him up good jest as he run past. He wuz skinny and he had a *mus*-tache; a leetle black one like them movie fellers has. He was talking out loud an' mad. Yit he sounded sort high-toned, too."

"Had you ever seen or heard him before?"

Amandus shook his head from side to side with a solemn movement. "Not never." he declared firmly. "I seen him good, y'understand, and he wuz a strancher to me. Ya."

Mr. Cauffman and Schneider exchanged looks and Schneider heaved a deep breath of relief. Mr. Cauffman adjusted his eyeglasses on his high nose.

"In regard to the fight,—did you see the combatants? Could you describe them?"

"I didn't see 'em," Amandus replied. "But I heerd a voice dat must a-come from a fat feller. Sich a voice as I never heerd outn a thin feller. Soft, and squakish, and whinin'. I learnt that kind of voice good and plenty, down back to Philly. In Baldwin's wuz a fat feller who wuz allus a-mockin' me. Ya, 'twuz a fat man dat de skinny one wuz fightin'. Sure. Now, ain't you a-goin to let dot Phil Van Dirk out? What's you waitin' fer?"

"Amandus he always tells the truth," Minerva suddenly flared, with her pink face on fire. "You ought to listen to him and let my Mr. Philip go on back home with me."

The two officials seemed disconcerted. They conferred hastily and the Justice spoke. "Your Mr. Phil's safe enough now, Minnie," he told her pacifically. "We all know 'Mandus never tells a lie, but there's official routine that's got to be gone through with. And you see, Phil's so dead beat that he's taking forty winks on the parlor lounge, and I give my word not to wake him till Mr. Jackson comes. You ladies better go along home now. Everything'll be all right. 'Mandus will stay here till Gus Brevort gets back, and then Jake can let him see the corpse."

"Not that that'll do any good," put in old Schneider, as he closed his note-book. "But its more reg'lar. Identifyin' the corpse is part and parcel of the evidence."

The Justice waved them out of the sitting-room with more assurances of Philip's absolute safety and of Amandus' return to the wedding breakfast that Minerva explained that she had left ready last night in the old ice-box down cellar. He stared a little as Sally, with her disarranged hair and stained sweater passed him, but he evidently thought her dress the result of haste to get to the scene and forgot it immediately she had passed beyond his range of vision.

Minerva padded rapidly along on her soft, flat feet, muttering happily, "My 'Mandus is the one who kin manich things. Ach, he talks and they all listen. Such a man is worth keeping, surely. It is well I don't let him off to marry that Lily Murphy, or my poor Mr. Phil wouldn't get loose, mebbe. My 'Mandus is always telling the truth."

At the next street they met Mr. Jackson, hurrying along in great agitation. He had left his hired car by the curb at Coroner Beemish's shop a square farther down the street.

"What's this about Phil?" he asked, not noting Sally's unusual aspect. "I don't believe a word of it. He's high-spirited, but a criminal,—never! There's some mistake."

Sally told him in a few, breathless words and

Minerva added her chorus in praise of her man's veracity. Mr. Jackson's agitation took on another form. "Arrested on such flimsy evidence, when they knew him incapable of such a deed. It's an outrage. They shall pay for this!"

He was about to move on when Sally detained him. "Did Mrs. Ellen come down with you?" she asked.

"Mrs. Van Dirk?" He stared in surprise. "I know nothing of her. Isn't she at home,—in Riverside House?" He moved on, repeating his threat. "By gad, I'll make them smart for this. Phil arrested!"

Minerva looked after him with an expression of deep satisfaction on her round face. "He knows the law. He will make them sing. They will have to eat crow. Ya, it is so;" and she started on again. "I must get back and make breakfast. They will need to eat. Ach, the poor Mr. Philip, he will be dropping from hunger. And my Amandus! yes, he will eat."

Sally found the house empty. Evidently the excitement had proved too strong a lure for Maria and she had snatched the opportunity for a chat with her Darktown friends. She hurried upstairs and flung off her soiled clothes, bathed and dressed, all in an incredibly short time. She had forgotten her fatigue in the excitement of the moment.

"I'll start breakfast, in case Mrs. Ellen comes," she thought. "Of course, she couldn't

know of this dreadful thing, but it'll do no harm."

She glanced out of the kitchen-window as she lighted the range and put on water to heat. The battered taxi from the station was speeding along River Road and she caught sight of a green hat. She ran to the portico and met Mrs. Ellen as she came up the steps. Her face was flushed and she greeted Sally effusively.

"My dearest girl, I have just heard of this appalling crime!" she cried. "It was telegraphed to the hotel by young Beemish,—he's a friend of the head-waiter,—and everyone was talking of it. I knew that Philip Van Dirk had a yellow streak in him. A murderer! And a Van Dirk! I am thankful my own Philip did not live to see the day his honored name was dragged in the mud like this."

Sally could not speak fast enough to set her right. She told Amandus' version of the story as she had heard it at Squire Cauffman's and blurted out all that she herself had seen of the fight, only omitting mention of the package, which was Philip's affair. She handed over the chamois bag. "If Philip had not chased the man, he'd never have risked dropping them into the boat. He'd have kept them on him," she ended, firmly. "He brought me home, safe, too. You'll have to give him credit for that, Mrs. Ellen."

Mrs. Van Dirk clutched the jewels. "My diamonds,—they dared to enter my house and steal my diamonds," she exclaimed in horrified amaze-

ment. "Ah, I said this house was under a ban. It never would have happened in town. I have had these jewels the greater part of my life and have felt safe with them until now. Maria was right,—it is no fit place for a Christian woman to live."

"Maria's had a tooth out," Sally began.

Mrs. Ellen would not listen. "To think of a stairway hidden in the laboratory closet," she went on in great excitement. "Why, the house may be undermined with secret passages, for all we know. It's horrible to be living over a nest of vipers like this. I shall have the place examined, every inch of it, and do away with all those dreadful places, if it takes car-loads of lumber and tons of cement."

Sally was afraid she would ask how long she had known of the secret stair but she was too taken up with the fact of its being there to care about such inquiries, even if they had occurred to her.

"I must see Mr. Jackson and find out what he knows about this place," she said, all alert for her own concerns at once. "Didn't you say he had come down?"

"He came about half an hour ago," Sally told her. "I asked about you but he said he knew nothing of you. Didn't you see him in Albany?"

"I certainly did not," Mrs. Ellen snapped. "He kept sending telegrams but I never laid eyes on him. It's another of those silly mysteries that the Van Dirks love." She moved towards the

stair. "Tell Maria to bring me some toast and an egg. I did not wait for breakfast. And you may as well go over to Gregg or whatever the electrician's name is and tell him to come at once. The wires must be mended, every one of them, this very day. I shall not stop in the house a single night unless the telephone and alarms are in perfect order."

When Sally went to the kitchen to prepare the tray, she was glad she had not betrayed Maria's defection; for, there in the pantry, was Maria herself busy with the bread-box. She looked up as Sally halted; and her mouth expanded in a grin that showed a double cavity in the front of her mouth.

"Ise gittin' breffus, Miss Sally, ma'am," she announced. "Yassum, Ise right yere on de job. Ise gwine to git yore breffus and den Ise gwine to quit. Miss Van Dirk she say she's goin' to *dis*-charge me ef I stay out all night. And I'm a-goin'. Nobody ain't a-goin' to *dis*-charge me whist I got my two foots to walk out on. No, ma'am."

"Don't be silly, Maria. I won't tell Mrs. Ellen. You weren't out on a pleasure-trip."

Maria did not reply but her manner as she moved about the kitchen was not convinced. "Weddin' and things," she muttered. "I ain't sayin' nuffin. But ghost-es ain't gwine to lay dar hands on me. Ise done wif ghost-es."

Sally left her grumbling and went to tell Mrs. Ellen that her tray would soon be ready. Mrs.

Ellen had changed her mind about having her breakfast in her room and made Maria fetch it out to the portico where the sun was shining and the air sweet with the scent of flowers. "It is too lovely to stay indoors where the memory of what happened last night is so fresh," she explained. "I am sickened with the thought of it."

She was overflowing with gratitude for the recovery of her diamonds. "No, don't tell me that it was Philip Van Dirk's coming to your aid that saved my precious mementoes of the past," she said warmly. "If you had not kept quiet in that boat and acted the part of the other villain so well, I'd never seen the jewels again. I am going to show my gratitude in a substantial way. The amount that Miss Cynthia placed in the bank for me, shall be yours."

Sally was without words to express her feelings. She had secretly condemned Mrs. Ellen for her harsh treatment of Miss Cynthia and here were the same hands showering benefits on her own head. She felt she ought to make amends for her traitorous thoughts. She opened her lips to speak but the words did not come. The sight of Mr. Jackson's hired car slowing down at the tenant-house made her forget everything else.

"There is Mr. Jackson alone!" she cried. "Where is Philip?"

"Possibly the police found flaws in that Fosbanner person's story," Mrs. Ellen remarked coldly. It did not please her to have her benefi-

cence disregarded like this. "Young Van Dirk may have been tricking you. How do you know he did not plan the whole thing?"

Sally's head began to swim. So many exciting, terrible things, one upon the other! It was too much for her, and she fainted, just as Mr. Jackson came up the steps.

They had her in the deep wicker chair and were urging her to drink some hot coffee when she opened her eyes. "My poor, dear, brave Sally," Mrs. Ellen was saying. "Sit up, dear, and take some hot coffee. It will make you feel better."

Sally, to her own astonishment, burst into tears. She was not the weepy sort, and felt bitterly ashamed of her weakness. "I—I—forgot to have any breakfast," she muttered, in excuse. "The smell of the toast was too much for me."

They could not do enough for her: Mr. Jackson held the cup to her lips, with soothing scraps of encouragement, "There, there, little girl . . . You'll be fit as a fiddle in a moment . . . no wonder you're a bit upset." Mrs. Ellen glided off after more substantial nourishment, declaring, in great indignation against herself, that she had never been so shockingly careless in her whole life. It was like a warm garment flung about a shivering body. Sally nestled down in the big chair and looked up at Mr. Jackson.

"Why didn't Philip come back?" she asked.

"Bless your little heart, is that what knocked

you over?" he exclaimed as he laid his warm strong hand on her small cold one. "Phil went down to Newburg. Made me run him out to Duncan's to borrow Claire's speedy roadster, —she's away on a visit up in Troy,—as if I wouldn't have been willing to let him have the taxi I came in! He took Henshaw, their old stable-boss, with him. The police got the man near Poughkeepsie. His motor-boat was running wild and crashed into the bridge. He must have been unconscious. He was badly wounded,—a knife cut in the lung."

"The fat man did it," Sally cried, all agitated. "After he was down. The other one staggered back—"

"Don't try to recall that appalling event," urged the lawyer kindly. "Phil told me all about it. I am giving you the facts that were 'phoned up to the Police Headquarters over here. I merely want to reassure you. They took him to the nearest hospital, regardless of the fact that the crime had been committed here. He is reported to be fatally hurt. Phil was greatly excited over the whole matter. I have never seen him in such a white-hot rage,—or perhaps it is not rage—"

Mrs. Ellen with the eggs and jam, followed by Maria bearing a small table, interrupted him for a short time, and the restraint appeared too much for him. He jumped up and paced about like a caged lion; Philip was not the only man whose

nerves had been shattered by the events of the night. He began before Maria had finished setting out the breakfast service before Sally.

"Philip has gone to get the facts, Mrs. Van Dirk," he broke out.

Mrs. Ellen made an imperious gesture of dismissal and Maria departed, with her mouth still open and her ears alert. Sally noted that she did not take the straight way along the hall towards her kitchen, but turned abruptly within the door.

Mr. Jackson continued. "He has commissioned me to ask you to grant him an interview when he returns. God knows what wild ideas the poor lad has in his head; he spoke in great excitement. Will you receive him?"

Mrs. Ellen did not reply directly. "Perhaps he will be the best person to give me the information I need," she murmured, untouched by any compassion for Philip in his recent ordeal. "You say you know nothing about this secret stair, but he must know all. I will receive him willingly, Mr. Jackson."

Sally had hoped for some response, some encouragement in Mrs. Ellen's manner but, if a vision of the two Van Dirk heirs reconciled had flashed before her, it faded. Mrs. Ellen lacked any great thought, great emotion,—a hard, empty woman wrapped in the cloak of her selfishness as in a thick garment.

Mr. Jackson did not appear to note her chill manner. He came towards her. "My dear lady,

you will not regret this," he cried. "I told Philip that you were reasonable and would listen to him. Whatever he has to say I shall be here. No, you will not regret this generous, this noble act."

Mrs. Ellen held up a firm finger. "Do not misunderstand me," she said, disregarding his outstretched hand. "This does not mean that I am weakening in my resolve. I shall never abdicate in his favor. That is," she added more hurriedly, "until the limit of my stewardship here has been reached. I shall take every precaution necessary to my comfort and safety here. I owe it to my departed Philip in whose place I stand. Today I will put these jewels," and she touched her wrist-bag, "these priceless mementoes of my dear ones, in the bank. I will get a man, two men to guard the place, and a fierce dog, preferably a bull-dog. And so, with my faithful Maria, I will keep the faith with my dear departed."

She looked almost as noble as Mr. Jackson had declared her to be and yet he did not applaud her resolutions. He got his hat from the chair where he had laid it, walked to the edge of the portico and said rather brusquely, "I shall send you immediate word of Philip's return. Of course, I had no intention bringing up the matter of succession. You must realize that. Let me thank you again for granting the interview. I trust it may be very soon. Good morning."

Mrs. Ellen sighed as she looked after him. "Ah, we never know people till we pass through deep

waters with them. I thought him a true friend. I have leaned upon him like a staff, and it has broken in my hand. Have some more jam, my dear, you look quite done up. I hope you are not going to be ill."

Sally protested. "I'm never ill. I'm very strong. I believe I'm sleepy, though." She was thinking of the package. She must find a chance to ask Philip about it as soon as he returned. Would he recover it, down there at the hospital, or was it lost forever?

Mr. Jackson, red and frowning, halted by the ash-trees and came back. "You spoke of telegrams from me, Mrs. Van Dirk," he said. "I sent no telegrams to you."

Her cheeks reddened and her hand went to the capacious wrist-bag that had never left her arm. "You certainly did. Not one, but four. One yesterday afternoon and three last night. I should never have been absent from home if it had not been for those telegrams."

He looked at them as she thrust them into his hand. "I see," he said slowly. "Part of their game. They got rid of you. Upon my soul, you are lucky to have obeyed the summons. You might have been lying dead this morning, instead of that man at Beemish's. Those fellows were a desperate pair."

Chapter XVIII

PHILIP SPEAKS

"'DEED Miss Sally, ma'am, I ain't sayin' nuffin' to Miss Van Dirk but dis chile is plum thru wif dis yere dwellin'-place. Jest as soon es Miss Nellie git dem gardeens what she speechify to Mr. Jackson about, Ise gwine to mek tracks,—yassum."

Maria thrust the tip of her tongue into the enlarged cavity in the front of her mouth, as if to put a full stop to the discussion. There was something so firm, so final, about her announcement that Sally was troubled.

"You've been saying that so often these last two days, Maria," she protested. "I believe you actually mean it. What do you expect to do,—go back to town, or marry Tip and work for him?"

This was a random shot but it made Maria squirm. "I ain't tellin' no lies about what I gwine to do," she muttered. "Mebbe I'se gwine to wuk in de boam-fachury. Cora Blue jest guv up de cleanin' job dere, 'case of de *ob*-nox-ious odors, and I kin git it, effen I so desires. But I ain't sayin' nuffin. Ise jest a-tellin' you."

Sally sat down on the window-seat in her

brown-and-yellow nest and pondered. In the two days that had passed since the robbery at Riverside, much had changed; not in the outer appearance of either the house or its occupants, for Mrs. Ellen had not got her two stout watchmen yet, nor had she found any other secret passages. The State Police had allowed one of the force to guard the place in the interval, and she had contented herself with barring both the outer entrance and the hidden door in the laboratory closet with stout iron bars until the other underground passages, which she was positive existed, should be discovered. No, it was not an outward change; it was rather an inner shifting of values.

Mrs. Ellen had shown increased concern over Sally's collapse after the strain of that night but, somehow, Sally had the impression that it was not entirely concern for her young companion's shaken nerves: there was more to it than that.

"She is afraid I am not really strong after all," she told herself, as her eyes wandered absently out over the country she had come to love so well. The full-leaved trees made a green frame for the gliding river, and, into the picture thus framed, came the white trailing smoke-plume of a river-tug,—perhaps the same boat that had picked up the escaping thief. It looked gay and saucy, out there on the sparkling water, as if it had never passed through storm and darkness on its path of justice.

"Like people," she thought. Like Philip, who

had come back from Newburg only an hour ago. She had seen him go into the tenant-house with Mr. Jackson, and, to her amazement, he had appeared remarkably well,—almost buoyant. He had been talking earnestly to his old friend, just as if no tragedy had occured. He must have recovered his lost treasure.

"I wish I could find out, before he comes over here, whether he got the package back or not," she thought, uneasily.

That package had been heavy on her conscience ever since he had thrust it into her arms, and her responsibility for it, now that it had been lost, weighed her down and made her absent and preoccupied. She had thought of it constantly and had been on the point of going to Mr. Jackson with her anxiety but the memory of Philip's words held her back . . . "you promised," he had said. "And . . . you are true blue." No, she could not disappoint him: she must wait. It would only be a couple of hours now, for he was to come, with Mr. Jackson, at five o'clock.

She roused herself and began to change her dress. All the pretty things that Miss Cynthia had given her were still in the big boxes. She hesitated; should she wear the grey dress, or her old white one? Mrs. Ellen might consider the grey a reminder of another unhappy episode. She would wear the white frock. Dear Miss Cynthia, if she were only here.

She got out the letter that had come that morn-

ing and read it again, with a warm sense of comfort at her heart. Miss Cynthia was so reasonable, and kind.

"Dearest girl," it began, "I have had such wonderful luck. I came right home to Center Bridge and got such a nice room, two windows on the front street opposite the War Memorial, and Mrs. Snow, the Deacon's wife, says I may have my old secretary-desk and the corner-cupboard with the carved torches on the top that I told you about. They are getting fine new ones from Chicago. I had a lovely time with you down there, and I think my money was well spent. I needed one real good time. I am going to go riding with Gladys Snow. They have two horses that can be saddled, and we will have great fun, going about. Love to Cousin Ellen, and more for yourself, Ever your friend,

Cynthia Dean.

"P. S. My riding-clothes have made a great impression. All the girls want to ride now, and Mrs. Judge Stockbridge asked me to the Hunt breakfast at their place, a thing she had never dreamed of before."

Meek . . . no, that was decidedly not the word for her. There had never been the remotest possibility of her allowing herself to be used for a door-mat. Sally realized that. "She's really a lot happier than she was before," she thought. "She didn't pay such a high price for her good time, after all."

Mrs. Ellen's step in the hall made her drop the letter into her desk again. She would take it out

later, after the interview with Philip Van Dirk had taken place, and the tension that held Mrs. Ellen's taut nerves should be relaxed. In the face of this absorbing event, who could be expected to be interested in a mere letter, chatty and satisfying as it was to Sally herself? Mrs. Ellen would see it from another angle, no doubt, and that was an added reason for postponement.

"I have come to have a serious talk with you, my dear, before you write your letter home,—you said you would send it today to explain your hasty note about the robbery," she said, as she drew Sally down on the window-seat beside her and took her hand. Sally had a fleeting memory of her first hour in Riverside on the small sofa in the sitting-room with Mrs. Ellen and she gave the hand that held her own a slight pressure. Mrs. Ellen had been very good to her. "Yes," she said, "I'll send it off tonight. It's all ready."

Mrs. Ellen glanced at the sealed envelope on the desk-pad, and cleared her throat. Her fingers moved nervously, rubbing the edge of the brown blotter where the finger-print was still plain. "I think we must open your letter and add a few words to it, my dear. A few words. Circumstances have arisen." She paused as if choosing her words carefully, "Circumstances over which none of us have any control. The robbery. The robbery. Yes."

Sally was amazed to see that she was actually hesitating from distaste of what she had come to

say. A sudden light broke on her. "Oh, Mrs. Van Dirk, you think that robbery had made me ill! I'm not, really. I'm quite all right now. But if you'd rather I'd go home—"

"Not *rather,* dear child," corrected the other. "It is a matter of conscience with me. I had rather you stayed, for you have been a great joy to me,—I will say that. A quiet, nice disposition and a good reading voice. Nothing would have given me more happiness than to keep you as long as your vacation lasted. But—"

It was settled then and there. Sally understood that Mrs. Ellen spoke from inmost conviction, and it would be hopeless to try to shake her belief that the tragic night had undermined Sally's health for the present, at least. She expressed great reluctance in parting with her young friend and prophesied many happy meetings.

"When you are your own bright self, we must have you here again," she said, kindly.

She even spoke of the presents from Miss Cynthia with toleration. Her slightly protruding brown eyes glanced down at the boxes under the desk and she smiled. "Your dear mother will approve all that you bring back from Riverside with you, I hope. Not only dear Cynthia's little gifts but also the more substantial ones. The reward for your courage in saving the diamonds, and this other present from me," she thrust her fingers in the tiny upper pocket of her blouse and

brought out something that sparkled. "With my love," she said, and slipped a ring on Sally's finger. "It is not so large. But it is very nice."

Sally exclaimed over the plain little ring with its imbedded stone. "It's beautiful!" she cried. "I never dreamed I should have a real diamond of my own!" and she held up her hand to see the play of light on the facets. And then she kissed Mrs. Ellen.

"It has a history," the donor told her. "It is the last gift my dear Aunt Anne gave me, just before she died. Poor dear Aunt Anne, she had no eye for good stones, though her heart was in the right place. I have never worn it, as it does not harmonize with my own diamonds. You will enjoy it, my dear, and if the departed can see what goes on in this sinful world, she will be pleased that so good a girl has her ring. Hark, was that the bell? Come down at once, my dear, for, as you know, Mr. Jackson said Philip Van Dirk had asked that you be present when he came."

She went out with her stiff, gliding gait, going to her own room, and Sally stood for a short space, staring at the yellowish gem on her finger. She did not see the ring, however, for she was looking within her own heart. What a surge of joy welled up, as she whispered, "Home. I'm going *home!*" The lop-sided old white house, the girls and Andy, her mother's lovely face, shone

before her and she stretched out her arms to them. "I'm coming," she said aloud. "Oh, I'm coming!"

"Yassum," said Maria's voice from the threshold where she stood. "I heard you, Miss Sally, ma'am. And I'se gwine to ax you to say a word fer me. Miss Van Dirk she got dem Stationary Police to tek keer of her now, and she done purchased a Hairdale dawg offen de Pet Shop, which dawg ain't gwine to be no pet o' mine, no ma'am, wif he nasty growlin' ways—"

"Come, Maria, tell me what you want," Sally broke in. "I hear Mr. Jackson on the front-porch, and you must answer the bell when it rings."

Maria puckered her brow. "Please, ma'am, I'm gwine to go my ways, outn dis yere house, and dat's what gwine to happen. And I axes you to 'splain dat fact to Miss Nellie."

"Well, I won't," Sally retorted firmly. "I am going myself and you must stay, as you promised. That's all there is to it. There's the bell."

Maria went along the back-hall and disappeared down the stairs. Sally hesitated, rather surprised that she had made no comment on her news. What was behind all this? Tip, perhaps. Worthless Tip, who only wanted someone to make life easy for him. All the town knew what Tip's motives were.

"If only I could stop her," she thought. It was her way to take responsibility on her own shoulders and she also had the habit of acting quickly.

Those words of her's about the fiery hand-

writing on the wall came back to her, as she heard the footsteps of the two visitors in the hall and Maria's response to Mr. Jackson's inquiry. "She'll be right down, Mr. Jacksum." Now was the chance, if ever, to fulfil that prophecy and save Mrs. Ellen's handmaid to her.

"I haven't any phosphorus," she thought, swiftly. "And it's broad daylight. But I've got to do it now, or she'll tell Mrs. Ellen as soon as they leave, and that will spoil everything."

She flew to Maria's darkened room, where the closed shutters and empty closet showed that there was no time to lose, if Maria was to be stayed. As she halted, a memory of the can of aluminum paint, used for the rusty radiator in the bath-room, came to her. She snatched it and hurried back, opening the can as she went. On the wall of the closet she printed in the shining paint, "THOU SHALT NOT MARRY TIP." She should have put down the full name Tipperary but was too hurried. Then she went out and opened the laboratory door, so that the slanting sun shone into the dark room, and full on the shining letters in the still darker closet.

"That will have to do," she said, and ran down the back stairs thinking, "She must see it at once,—before the sun moves away from it."

At the kitchen door she met Maria, who was carrying her battered alligator-skin grip, which she dropped at the sight of Sally. Sally paid no heed to her splutter of explanation. "Mrs. Ellen

said you were to have an early supper ready for us in the breakfast-room,'' she counted on Maria's habit of obeying orders. ''I'll be out to tell you when they've gone,'' she stooped, and quickly picked up the bag. ''Are you sure you've got everything in this, Maria? Better look and see if you've left anything.''

Maria was too stunned by her swift action to protest. She stood with her mouth open, staring, while Sally walked off with the grip. Maria would never dare follow to the front-hall, she thought, as she put it down beside the carved chest, where it would not be seen. Then she walked into the drawing-room, feeling that she had done her best.

In the next instant she had forgotten Maria and her foolish infatuation. Her heart beat hard as she saw the group in the center of the room; Philip Van Dirk, pale, erect, and with a new dignity upon him; Mrs. Ellen in her elaborate new gown with diamonds sparkling upon hands and breast, and an air of much hauteur; Mr. Jackson, perturbed and silent, as if he were not quite sure of what sort of an encounter this meeting would turn out to be. Mrs. Ellen was speaking.

'' . . . receive you, upon Mr. Jackson's request. A Christian should not hold malice.'' She broke off at Sally's entrance, and waved her rather formally to the nearest chair. ''We are all quite ready to hear what you have to say, Mr. Van Dirk,'' and she folded her hands.

In the brief silence, Sally thought she heard a

distant howl from the Airedale, chained out in the tool-house, but her whole mind was on Philip Van Dirk, standing tall and grave before the empty white marble fireplace.

Philip drew himself up and then bowed with the old-fashioned courtesy that his grandfather had taught him. "You are very good, Mrs. Van Dirk," he said and, to Sally's amazement, his voice was sincere. "I will try to be brief and clear. What I have to say is in the nature of a confession."

"Ah—h," murmured Mrs. Ellen, involuntarily. All her old suspicions looked out of her faded brown eyes.

Philip did not shift his gaze from her face. "I have come to lay my poor, cheap revenge on the altar of our common name, Mrs. Van Dirk. To blot out, if possible, my folly, my criminal folly."

Sally's heart contracted, and Mr. Jackson cried out in distress, "Phil! You surely—"

"I had planned to enjoy the fruits of a petty revenge," Philip went on, unmoved in his deep earnestness. "What happened that night and what I have seen down in the Newburg hospital has taken the rancor out of my heart. I want to make such restitution as is in my power."

He brought out the parcel and laid it on the table before the mistress of Riverside. Sally could not restrain a low cry. Mrs. Ellen sat rigid.

"Open it, please," he said, with a ring of his old arrogance in his voice.

"I will not touch anything that comes from

you," she broke out with so much agitation that they all looked at her.

"Then I must do it," he said, loosing the string that bound the package. "After all, it is fitting that I should, though it burns my fingers . . ."

Sally started forward as the wrappers were thrown off and she saw what lay on the table. A book so beautiful that her eyes could not leave it. Not a large book but it shone with golden clasps, and jewels flashed in its ivory cover, and it glowed with rich reds and blues.

"The Book of Hours!" she breathed.

"That sham!" cried Mrs. Ellen with energy. "Why bring it here to—"

"The real Book,—not the sham one," Philip spoke with tremendous earnestness, addressing his old friend as much as Mrs. Ellen. "When I learned I was not to have the Book,—that day at the hospital, I did not realize how much it meant to me. But as time went on I grew furious with the fate that had taken it from me,—the one male Van Dirk in direct line. I could not sleep for thinking of it. Even my laboratory work came to a halt. When I knew that the Book was actually to be disposed of, and that a woman, a stranger, was to take my place in the old house and before the world as the donor of the Book, I vowed I would die before I would see that come to pass."

"But, Phil, my boy," Mr. Jackson broke out in

helpless misery, "you ought to have told me. You ought to have protested the will—"

Once again Philip ignored him. "I had made the secret stair at my grandfather's suggestion. In case the alarms went off, I was to get the Book, —I knew where it was,—and make off with it to safety. We made it four years ago while Minerva was visiting her friends, and he got a mason from Pittsburgh, an old fellow who died soon after, to finish it up for us. That secret stair suggested the way for me."

"I knew it," murmured Mrs. Ellen. "I knew that wretched passage was at the bottom of all the wickedness."

"I came in and took the Book from its hiding-place, and the old missal, and with great labor made a copy,—my ruby and diamond ring, my mother's turquoise set and all the gold I could buy. I came back and forth every night, for I had a feeling that the Book must be in its place during the day. That started the story of the haunted house. I had not quite finished when you," turning to Sally "came to Riverside. But it was the man who has just died down there who was searching the house then."

"The murderer? A murderer in my house!" Mrs. Ellen's face paled, and Mr. Jackson leaned forward on the arms of his chair. "Go on, my boy," he urged.

"That man saw me go in by the door one eve-

ning and he told me that it decided him to try the job. He had got a vague clue from some talk in the tea-room at the Ten Eyck but was afraid of the alarm-system he'd been told of by some Gypsies who'd been here," Philip was taking his time to make all clear to the bewildered lady before him. "He did not know just what he was after, it seems, and so he searched carefully, coming in when he got the chance, and worked through the lower floors first."

Sally thought of the blurred finger-print on the blotter and shuddered but Mrs. Ellen was indignant. "The impudence of him!" she cried. "And we never knew he was in the house."

"He took care that you should be away when he came," Philip explained. "Those telegrams were part of his last attempt before the two men should escape to South America. He had got the diamonds but had the hunch, as he said, that there was something more valuable. He said that the people in the Ten Eyck were not the sort to whisper about a handful of sparklers, no matter how white the stones were. He noticed the third shelf in the den, where a book was missing—"

"He took it, after all!" Sally murmured under her breath.

"He was just going to investigate when Miss Shaw frightened him off,—and you know how she got the jewels back," Philip went on. "I came in when I heard the alarm in the den, and when I

ran to see what damage had been done, I grabbed the Book out of the safe and hid it under the sweater I had on my arm until I put it under some boxes in the boat-house locker. Even then I did not mean to return it. I meant to keep it until I should come into possession and then to follow out grandfather's last wishes,—sell it and use the money as he desired."

Mrs. Ellen blinked her eyes at him. "And why didn't you carry out your fine scheme?" she asked coldly.

"I have told you, Mrs. Van Dirk," replied Philip quietly. "Those two dead men have shown me what value to put upon such things. And perhaps it is a sort of thank-offering, too. I went down there with a great fear in my heart," he spoke to Mr. Jackson, who seemed to understand. "I found, thank God, that I had never laid eyes on the man before. And now, Mrs. Van Dirk, I have returned the Book and made my confession. I will bid you goodbye and wish you happiness from the bottom of my heart. I leave the Book of Hours in your hands."

Mrs. Ellen did not move. "It appears to me," she said slowly "that you have been quite as much of a thief as those two robbers. I do not accept your good wishes. You may rest assured that I shall never forgive you for all the misery you have caused me. It was bad enough to live in a great barn of house in the wilds, without being in

danger of my life. I bid you good afternoon, Mr. Philip Van Dirk. I trust I shall never have to look upon your face again."

In the moment of petrified silence that followed, she put out her jewelled bony hand to the bell-push, and rose magnificent in her dignity. "My maid will show you the way out," she said. "Mr. Jackson, I regret that you have allowed your kindness to be deceived by this—this—impostor, but since you appear to have taken sides with him, our relations hereafter will be confined strictly to business. I will insist that you take this wretched thing in charge again, until its fate shall be settled," and she pushed the button with a firm finger.

Philip flung a look at Sally, an enigmatical look that held more than she could understand. He actually smiled as he bowed to the erect figure of Mrs. Van Dirk who was looking with impatience towards the hall where Maria should have appeared to usher out the visitors.

"I think we can find our way out," he said, taking up his hat. "Mr. Jackson has been here more recently than I, and he can guide me if I get lost."

He went out with the same whimsical air that had so often puzzled Sally in the past; today she understood it better. It was a cloak for feelings that might not be shown. Mr. Jackson had no such cover for his emotions. He picked up the Book with its wrappers hanging in disorder, seized his

Panama and cane, and marched past Mrs. Ellen in visible wrath.

At the drawing-room door he turned. "I will notify you, madame, what steps I shall take in regard to this matter," he said restraining his rage with some difficulty. "It will be best to wait a while, until our minds are clearer. Good afternoon."

Mrs. Ellen stood where she was, staring after them, until they had disappeared and their steps could be heard on the gravel. Not a word did she say, nor did she seem to feel that she had played any save a righteous part in the scene that had just closed. When she roused herself, she spoke in her usual tone. "Go find Maria, my dear, and send her to me. I cannot allow her to become so lax about answering the bell."

Sally, still tingling from the interview, was in the hall when she called, "Wait. It may be another broken wire. I'll come myself."

The kitchen was empty. Mrs. Ellen was about to investigate the bell-wires on the buzzer by the pantry-door when Sally caught sight of a piece of paper on the kitchen table. It had several lines of large scrawled writing on it. Maria had left a note!

Mrs. Ellen read it with shaking fingers and blazing eyes. "The ingrate, the wretched ingrate," she cried. "See how she has rewarded me, after all these years."

Sally read the paper thrust into her hands.

"Them words on the wall is too late. Me and Tip got married last nite & we got a job in katkill hotel good pay. mr philp ghost das not hant a lady with a titel. afexion and thanks from mrs. Maria johnson."

Spurred on by Minerva's elopement Maria had taken the reins in her own hands. She had got her title.

Mrs. Ellen sat down on the nearest chair, and stared at the inlaid linoleum as if she expected it to open and swallow her up.

"Maria," she said, dully. "My Maria, who has been with me all my married life,—all my life since I married Philip, that is. How shall I ever do without her! Oh, gratitude, gratitude, where can you be found in this sinful world!"

Chapter XIX

AFTERMATH

SALLY was on the hill.

The August sun shone with a warm golden splendor that brought out the scent of the bunch of white lilies that had come up of themselves at the edge of the truck-patch. Over the wave of hills, the church-spire gleamed against the blue, like a steadfast finger pointing upward to the happy islands of the sky.

She did not frown at the onion-bed, where the fat stalks lay broken down to keep the round heads from maturing. She was smiling to herself as she stooped to gather the round full globes of brilliant tomatoes from the carefully-tied vines. It was her first Saturday at home. Down in the lop-sided white house Mrs. Shaw was taking a seam in the coral blouse which had proved too large for Sally in spite of Miss Cynthia's measurements. Aimee was washing the lunch dishes, and Janet was watching for Andy, who had found it necessary to board near the office and only came home over the week-ends. Dear old Andy.

"He is in the right place," she thought. "Mother says they all like him and he'll get on

finely,'' and she moved her basket farther along the row. ''I'm glad Philip liked him.''

Philip had liked them all, for that matter, and had declared that if he had not other pressing duties to call him hence, he would have liked nothing better than to camp at the old white house for the rest of his life. ''He's never had a real family of his own,'' she thought. ''And Mother is so perfectly fine. She is the real thing, not an imitation lady. I wonder whether he will ever ask us up to Riverside, as he said. Perhaps it was only his nonsense.''

She sat back on her heels and let memory drift backward. Was it only last week that she had seen Mrs. Ellen's composure collapse under the blow Maria had dealt her?—only last week that she had heard her say, as she rose from that kitchen-chair, ''This settles it. I give up. I will not wear out my life in a great barn like this,—no, not even to spite that impudent Philip Van Dirk. . . . I shall shake the dust of this heathenish place from my feet. . . . I loathe the country, anyway.''

How quickly it had all been arranged. Mr. Jackson had been kindness itself and Philip had not shown too much enthusiasm before the departing lady. For Mrs. Ellen did see Philip Van Dirk again, in spite of her clearly expressed wishes to the contrary, and she had not made the interviews in Mr. Jackson's office too easy for the

young man, whose grave respectful manner took something of the sting out of her defeat.

For it was defeat to Mrs. Ellen. She looked on it as a special chastisement for her acceptance of the Van Dirk inheritance and her occupancy of the house with the heathen idols on its front. Her last words as she and Sally were parting on the gravel before the portico steps came back to Sally now.

"My dear, no Christian should be willing to live in that place while those godless images are there. I would like to have them blotted out, but my reign is over. I am thankful that I have done away with that secret stair. That is one thing accomplished. Goodbye, and write to me when you get home. My address will be the Martha Louise in Philadelphia. There, go along. I do not care to meet that Philip Van Dirk any more than I have to."

It was Philip who had brought Sally home. Claire Duncan had returned from her visit and insisted on lending her car. She had ridden part of the way down the road with them and they had parted in high spirits, planning all sorts of good times for the future. Claire had told them at the last moment, just before she turned her horse's head towards home, that she and Betty were to have a double wedding in the old church in Kingston, where their grandmothers and great-grandmothers had been married. Betty was to

marry Lloyd and Claire had chosen Henry Van Rensselaer, an old college friend who had been paying a visit in the same house where she had spent the last few weeks.

"It's like a story," Sally thought, glancing towards the hill where the heat-mirage danced over the corn-field. The robin on the cherry-tree by the boundary fence cocked his head sideways at her and hopped back to his nest with its second brood. "He wasn't a bit hurt about Betty Evans, either. He's so full of Riverside and his ivory-process that he doesn't care for anything else."

Philip hadn't quite succeeded in his process for making ivory permanently white; though he had almost done it. Old Mr. Staffern had been pleased at the results he had got with his treasured tusk and had forgiven him for stealing it. Yes, Philip had actually stolen that tusk. Mr. Rex had told Sally about it when she met him that last day at the Post Office. The old man was ready to eat up those Gypsies, but they had disappeared, vanished, not a trace of them to be found. So when Philip brought in the tusk, not a whit the worse for his experiments, and maybe a bit the better for them, the old gentleman had been so glad to get it back that he hadn't said beans.

"It's funny," she thought, "how it has all turned out. The Book is going to be sold and Philip will live in Riverside again. I wonder if the Colonel can see how that last will of his has been set aside. Not by Philip but by something differ-

ent, something bigger. Some people call it fate. I think it was God."

The wind shook the little curls into her eyes and she tucked them up into the loose waves of hair behind her ears, as she stooped to her task again. Her thoughts went steadily northward to Riverside.

It was up there, beside the river, and the shadows of the ash-trees would be lying in violet patterns on the portico and lawns. The Goddess Ma-at and the heads of Anubis would be looking out across the hurrying blue river and there would be the white Albany boat at the wharf by the distant town on the other bank. The scent of the mountains would be on the air—

"Sally! Sally!"

It was Janet's voice, shrill with excitement.

"Here I am, up in the tomato-patch," called Sally, jumping to her feet.

She could see Janet mounting rapidly and, farther down the slope, the glint of Aimee's red dress could be seen between the trees. Sally did not wait. She left the basket of shining tomatoes where it stood and ran to meet them.

"Guess who's here?" cried Janet, between panting breaths. "That Miss Cynthia you told us about. She wants to see you. There's a big old man with her. And she's got on the sweetest lace dress!"

Aimee arrived at the same moment. She nodded. "It's not Miss Cynthia, you goose," she

said to Janet. "It's Mrs. Jackson and they've come around this way on their honey-moon—"

"Honey-moon!" cried Sally. "Miss Cynthia!"

"And they're going to Provincetown to paint," put in Janet.

"And Mr. Jackson has a letter from Philip Dukes. Oh, Sally, do come on down, quick! We're going to move,—" cried Aimee.

"To Riverside!" crowed Janet. "That lovely big house."

Sally recovered. "See here, you two are making things up," she said sternly. "I don't believe there is anyone down there at all."

Aimee became hoarse with earnestness. "Indeed and indeed it is all true, Sally," she declared. "Mr. Jackson brought a letter from Philip and he's arranging it with Mother now. Philip wants Mother to be a sort of mother to him,—not a housekeeper. He's got Minerva for that and her Amandus is gardener. And we are to go to school in a lovely school—"

"And he's coming down to talk it over tomorrow!" Janet broke in, eagerly. "Oh, Sally, do you think you can make Mother go?"

Aimee turned on her younger sister with a look of scorn. "Mother doesn't need anyone to make her do anything. Besides, she's been saying yes all the time. Andy is down there, too, and he says it's the best ever. Come along, Sally, and hear all about it."

The robin had flown to the boundary-fence and,

stimulated by the sound of voices, burst into song. Sally took a hand of each of the girls in her own and started down the hill with the echo of that bubbling song in her heart. She seemed to hear the oriole in the ash-tree at Riverside, singing in its nest by the tool-house. That day when she had watched the fluttering birds seek a nesting place came back to her.

"If I hadn't found the secret stair that day, I wouldn't have been able to follow the robber, and get the diamonds," she thought. "And Mrs. Ellen might not have left Riverside. And—"

Aloud she said joyfully, "It's been a real stairway to happiness—for me,—for us all. I'm glad I found it!"

The two girls looked at each other as they slacked their pace. Aimee shook her head. "That sounds pretty queer to me. Sally, I hope you aren't going crazy, what with the ghosts and robbers and all."

Sally laughed a clear joyous laugh and shook back the little curls. "No, I'm not going crazy," she cried. "I'm going to Riverside. . . . Lovely Riverside. Come, let's run. I want to see Miss—*Mrs.* Jackson and hear all about everything!"

THE END